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Human Rights and Democracy:

The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report

Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report

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CONTENTS

Case studies

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Foreword by Foreign Secretary William Hague

The promotion and protection of human rights is at the heart of the UK's foreign policy objectives. I, along with my ministerial team, consistently raise human rights violations wherever and whenever they occur. And with this in mind, I am delighted to introduce the FCO's 2012 Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report, which details our efforts to promote human rights during 2012.

We have made a number of changes to this year's report, including two new chapters. The first is on **Promoting and Protecting Human Rights through the UN**, and describes our work on human rights through the UN – the forum in which the UK seeks to promote a coordinated response to human rights violations from the international community. The second is on our **Human Rights and Democracy Programme**, an important source of funding that allows us to support hundreds of human-rights-related projects around the world.

Another innovation to this year's report is a new section on the **Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative** (PSVI), which I launched in May. The aim of this initiative is to strengthen and coordinate international efforts to prevent and respond to atrocities involving sexual violence, and to break down the culture of impunity around such crimes. We have included details of the work we have undertaken so far on PSVI, as well as a case study on the first deployment of a UK team of experts to the Syrian border to document abuses and provide essential training.

This year we have taken a fresh look at our methodology for including states in the **Countries of Concern** section. The new methodology will ensure that our criteria remain robust, particularly in response to the interest that the Foreign Affairs Committee and members of my Advisory Group on Human Rights have shown in this section. The primary factor in our consideration remains the overall human rights situation in a country. But we also take into account how well the UK is placed to work for change. As a result of this analysis, we retained 27 of the 28 countries highlighted in 2011, dropping only Chad.

My Advisory Group on Human Rights provided valuable input into reviewing those criteria, and the group continues to make a significant contribution to the development and implementation of our policy on human rights. I thank the group's members for their commitment and their achievements so far, and look forward to continuing to work with them.

But in **Syria** we continue to see terrible atrocities committed against civilians. The situation deteriorated further in 2012, with further reports of massacres, including against children. I repeatedly condemned these terrible acts and have instructed our diplomats to take every opportunity to highlight these violations and abuses and call for action at the international level. The UK has been at the forefront of the work of the UN Human Rights Council on Syria and has co-sponsored a number of resolutions, including one to condemn the al-Houleh massacre. We are working to ensure that all perpetrators will be held accountable, and in April we sent a team to the region to gather evidence and provide training to Syrian

activists to document human rights violations and abuses. This will provide a basis of information that can be used for future accountability processes. We are also at the forefront of calls for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC). We believe that the blame for the escalating violence lies on the shoulders of Assad and his regime, and in 2013 we will work with the Syrian National Coalition and the international community to achieve a political transition to bring a sustainable end to this intolerable violence.

In contrast to Syria there have been positive developments elsewhere in 2012, including in those countries that were part of the **Arab Spring**: the first ever democratic presidential elections in Egypt; a democratically elected government in Tunisia; a renewed sense of optimism in Libya, which I visited in July, shortly after their first national elections in over 40 years; a new constitution in Morocco, which has created a framework for deeper reform and greater freedom; and the start of a process of political reform in Jordan, where elections in January 2013 represented a significant step forward in the transition to parliamentary democracy. We have been supporting democratic and economic reform in the Middle East through political advocacy, by working with multilateral organisations, and by supporting reform programmes, including through our £110 million Arab Partnership Fund. Change will be a long-term process and there will be challenges along the way, but much has already been achieved. We are in this for the long run.

In 2012, we also saw the conviction of Charles Taylor by the **Special Court for Sierra Leone** – the first time in recent years that a former head of state has been held to account for their role in war crimes and human rights violations. This was a landmark for international justice and the fight against impunity.

The situation in **Somalia** has also improved considerably over the last year, with a peaceful transition of power to a more representative political process. The London Conference in February played a role in delivering this progress. However, big challenges lie ahead of the new Federal Government, not least in providing security and basic services to the people of Somalia. The UK and Somalia have agreed to jointly host an international conference on Somalia in the UK in May 2013. This conference will mark the beginning of a new partnership between Somalia and its friends and neighbours.

We are also continuing with our efforts to support positive developments in **Burma**. When Aung San Suu Kyi came to the Foreign Office in June, she thanked the UK for never forgetting her during 20 years of oppression and struggle, even when others lost interest or heart. And I was pleased that, shortly after my visit to the country in January, the Burmese government signed an historic initial peace agreement with the Karen National Union after 63 years of conflict, and released a significant number of prominent political prisoners. However, there are ongoing challenges, particularly in Rakhine State, where inter communal fighting has led to the displacement of over 100,000 people. We will continue to play a leading role in the international community's response to this issue and in ensuring that long-term solutions are found to the issue of Rohingya citizenship.

The UK also used its chairmanship of the **Council of Europe**'s Committee of Ministers from November 2011 to May 2012 to secure reform of the European Court of Human Rights, building on the Interlaken and Izmir Declarations. The Declaration from the Brighton

Conference in April was adopted unanimously by the 47 member states of the Council of Europe; it sets out a series of concrete reforms that should reduce the court's backlog of applications and help to ensure that the court focuses on the most important cases.

The UK will continue to be active throughout 2013, working with individual countries, with civil society and through international organisations like the UN. And I hope that 2013 will conclude with our successful election to the UN Human Rights Council. We will remain vigilant to emerging situations where human rights are at risk, and continue to build solutions to longer-term problems, in pursuit of our vision of a world where the human rights of all people are respected.

Foreword by Senior Minister of State Baroness Warsi

Since joining the ministerial team at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in September, I have been struck by the dedication and commitment of our staff in London and overseas, who work relentlessly to support and defend human rights and democracy across the globe. I am proud to be leading the UK's role in this global effort.

There is consensus across British society and politics that Britain should stand up for democratic freedom, for universal human rights and for the rule of law. During this period of immense global change, I firmly believe that the UK has stayed true to these values. We are always at the forefront of efforts to support democracy, freedom and peace around the world.

The way we work varies from country to country. In places with poor human rights records or in those lacking effective democratic institutions, our focus may be on encouraging reform. In emerging democracies and economies, it may be about working together to support human rights and democracy – not just domestically, but also internationally. I have seen this myself at the UN Human Rights Council, where we increasingly find ourselves working with countries such as Mexico, Chile, South Korea and, perhaps most inspiringly of all, Tunisia – birthplace of the Arab Spring.

The FCO has six specific human rights priorities. These are: women's rights; torture prevention; abolition of the death penalty; freedom of religion or belief; business and human rights; and freedom of expression on the Internet. We worked hard to make progress on each of these areas over the course of last year.

We continued to spread the message that ending all forms of **violence against women** and girls can help to build stable and prosperous communities, societies and economies. I was pleased that UN Women, the UN body promoting gender equality, included violence against women and girls (VAWG) as one of its six priorities. In 2012, the UK also signed the Council of Europe convention on VAWG, which reaffirmed our long-standing commitment to women's rights.

Last year saw the first anniversary of the FCO strategy for the **prevention of torture**, which sets out how we are working to prevent torture globally. In November, we hosted an event to reflect on the impact of the strategy so far, during which we heard powerful accounts from a survivor of torture and from individuals working to prevent it. Our work was given a boost in October with the election of Professor Malcolm Evans to the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture.

In 2012, the UK lobbied actively at the UN General Assembly in favour of the biennial resolution calling for a moratorium on the use of the **death penalty**. I addressed an international meeting on this issue in New York in September and lobbied foreign diplomats at an event in London marking World Day Against the Death Penalty. The vote on the

resolution in December was passed by the largest-recorded majority, reflecting the global trend towards abolition.

Promoting **freedom of religion or belief** and tackling religious intolerance are particular priorities for me. Both were areas of grave concern in 2012, with an increasing number of individuals attacked, abused, imprisoned and discriminated against. It is crucial that we respond, which is why I spoke out in defence of freedom of religion during Ministerial Week at the UN General Assembly. It is also why we hosted a conference with Canada in December focused on these issues. I was pleased to begin this New Year by convening an international meeting to build a stronger international political consensus on ensuring freedom of religion or belief for all.

The promotion of Britain's prosperity and the protection of human rights are not mutually exclusive; they are mutually *supportive* priorities at the heart of Government policy. The UK has drafted the world's first national strategy to implement the UN Guiding Principles on **Business and Human Rights**, which we will publish later in 2013.

In September, I took part in an event about **freedom of expression** and the Internet. The Foreign Secretary's speech at the Budapest Conference on Cyberspace in October underlined the importance of finding that difficult balance between respecting the security of the Internet and guaranteeing freedom of expression. We will need to work with a wide range of countries to ensure that we get the balance right.

As Minister responsible for human rights, I follow developments closely in countries across the world. But I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on three areas of my portfolio in particular.

During my visit to **Afghanistan** in October, I met representatives of government and civil society to discuss human rights. I was struck by the immense bravery and dedication shown by those individuals who promote and protect human rights. They work tirelessly to improve the lives of Afghan people, especially women and children, and they deserve our respect, admiration and support. Real change will take time, but I am personally committed to this agenda and I have made clear the UK's commitment to work to ensure that all Afghan people, including women, are full and equal participants in their country's future.

The elections this year in **Pakistan** will be a crucial milestone in the country's democratic history. But the barbaric attack in October on girls' rights campaigner Malala Yousafzai was a shocking example of the difficult issues Pakistan continues to face. It demonstrated the devastating effect extremism and violence can have on people in Pakistan, where people of all backgrounds and faiths, NGOs, human rights defenders and the media face regular threats and persecution. We are intensifying our efforts to help and encourage Pakistan to address these issues.

In this year's report, **Bangladesh** has been added as a case study. The next parliamentary elections are due by January 2014 and mark a real opportunity to break the cyclical pattern of political violence. We will continue to provide ongoing support to strengthen democratic practices and institutions to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections. We will also continue to monitor the International Crimes Tribunal where international non-governmental

organisations have voiced concerns over the court's procedures. We will continue to make representations against the use of the death penalty in Bangladesh.

It was a privilege to host the launch events in Geneva and London in support of our campaign for **election to the UN Human Rights Council**. We made a number of pledges of increased UK activity in areas where we believe the UK's leadership can make the biggest difference, such as preventing sexual violence in conflict.

In 2013, we will continue to work with NGOs, UN bodies and governments to ensure that the council is a strong and credible voice on human rights. One of its key tools is the Universal Periodic Review: there is no other peer review mechanism like it in the UN system. I am proud that the UK approached its own review last year in a spirit of openness, transparency and consultation. We will encourage other countries to do the same.

This report is the product of a great deal of work. Through it we try to give you a picture of what our human rights policy is and what we do to implement it. I hope you will find it interesting, informative and useful. However, we always want to do better. I hope you will give us your feedback and suggestions if you see ways in which we could improve the **report**, because I want us to be as clear as possible about the UK's commitment to human rights.

SECTION I: Promoting and Protecting Human Rights through the UN

The year 2012 was significant for UK human rights work in the UN. We played a leading role in the development of a multilateral response to those countries which committed the most serious and widespread violations against their own citizens. Key successes included increased action in the Human Rights Council on Syria, multilateral action on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Iran and Burma and action on thematic areas such as business and human rights and the prevention of sexual violence. We also supported the creation of several Special Rapporteurs, all of whom will contribute to greater international scrutiny and pressure on those committing human rights violations.

What Did We Seek to Achieve through the UN?

The multilateral human rights architecture forms the institutional basis for the delivery of the UK's international human rights priorities, strengthening dialogue between states on human rights and providing a platform for both scrutiny and practical assistance. We seek to improve the implementation by UN member states of their human rights obligations under the major UN human rights treaties. We also encourage the UN to promote human rights in practice and to address all human rights violations. We do this by being active in the Human Rights Council (HRC), the United Nations General Assembly 3rd Committee (UNGA 3rd Committee) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The HRC, an intergovernmental body within the United Nations system and made up of 47 states, is responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe. The UNGA 3rd Committee, officially the "Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee", focuses, along with other issues, on the examination of human rights questions, including reports of HRC Special Rapporteurs. The UNSC has primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.

We also support the expert mechanisms established by these bodies, including Special Rapporteurs and UN human rights treaty bodies, as well as the High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office. For the UN to achieve its objectives on human rights, it needs to work effectively and respond to new challenges. We are therefore committed to supporting efforts to strengthen further the UN system, including working to mainstream human rights within the UN's development and peace and security agendas.

Senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Minister of State Baroness Warsi launched the UK campaign for election to the HRC for the period 2014–16 in both London and Geneva. We believe we can make a strong contribution to the work of the council, and will continue to promote our candidacy ahead of the election which takes place in late 2013. While we have played an active role in the HRC response to situations of concern during our mandatory term away from the HRC, election to the council is a UK priority. We believe this will enhance our ability to influence and shape the human rights agenda. If elected, it would be the third time the UK has been elected to the HRC since its creation in 2006. As always, we would take that responsibility seriously as a passionate, committed and, we believe,

effective defender of human rights. Our human rights policy pledges and commitments form the core of our campaign, and can be found at:
www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/global-issues/human-rights/un-hr-candidate221012

What Did We Achieve in the UN System on Human Rights?

Making institutions stronger

We continued to work with UN human rights mechanisms to improve their effectiveness and protect their independence throughout 2012. Highlights included our work on the Universal Periodic Review and our continued support for the treaty body system.

We are committed to the success of the Universal Periodic Review process, which examines the human rights situation in all UN member states over a four-year cycle. This unique system works through peer review and uses an interactive dialogue between the state under review and all other UN member states, along with written reports by the state concerned, the UN system and civil society, to encourage action to improve states' human rights records. The value of the Universal Periodic Review lies in its universal nature, constructive spirit and how it complements other procedures. We are determined to uphold these fundamental principles and to seek the implementation of recommendations that emerge from the peer review process. In 2012, the Universal Periodic Review entered its second cycle, with all UN member states now undertaking the process for a second time and reporting on implementation of previous recommendations. The UK undertook its second Universal Periodic Review in May 2012, having had its first in April 2008. The FCO worked closely with the Ministry of Justice, which has lead responsibility for the UK's review (see case study on lessons learned from the Universal Periodic Review).

Case study: Lessons learned from the UK's 2012 Universal Periodic Review

The Universal Periodic Review should be regarded as a process of ongoing and continuous dialogue, not merely an event that occurs every four years. It is this dialogue and the implementation between each review that has the potential for far-reaching impact. Each subsequent cycle should therefore be seen as building upon past reviews rather than as a fresh process that begins just a few months before a member state's interactive dialogue.

Working constructively with other member states and promoting good practice
The UK approached its second review in a spirit of openness and welcomed the level of scrutiny it received from member states. While we believe the UK has a good human rights record, we have consistently made clear that there is always room for improvement and that we are open to learning from others. In the spirit of cooperation, we took care to respond in writing to those member states which raised issues during our interactive dialogue to which we were not able to respond during our session.

Engagement with civil society
Although the Universal Periodic Review is a state-led process, national human rights institutions and NGOs play a central role in informing and influencing the shape of the debate before, during and after the interactive dialogue. In advance of our review, the Ministry of Justice hosted a number of outreach events across all parts of the United Kingdom, including a ministerial round table shortly before the delegation went to Geneva, in order to gauge the views of civil society and understand their priorities. There were also dedicated web pages about the Universal Periodic Review on the Ministry of Justice website (www.justice.gov.uk/human-rights/universal-periodic-review). These contained information about the outreach events and a link to the key documents (our national report and our response to the UN's final report of the process).

Approach to deliberating on recommendations received at the review
Following the UK's review, the Minister of State for Justice, Lord McNally, reserved the UK's position on all 132 recommendations received in order to consult other government departments, the devolved administrations and civil society. Lord McNally met civil society organisations immediately following the UK's interactive dialogue in Geneva, and this was followed up with a ministerial round table in London. These meetings were an opportunity to understand which recommendations civil society organisations regarded as a priority for the UK. Similar exercises took place in the devolved administrations. In the interest of transparency, the UK's formal response included an "Annex" that provided a narrative explanation of the UK's position against each of the recommendations received, including those that do not currently enjoy the support of the UK. The narrative included input from the devolved administrations on those recommendations which fell within their competence. The UK Government hopes that the "Annex" can be used to inform ongoing discussions with civil society and others on implementation of the recommendations. We also expect the document to be used as a tool by other member states to interpret the progress the UK has made in implementing the accepted recommendations at its mid-term review in 2014 and

Implementation of recommendations and preparation for next review in 2016
The UK is committed to keeping all recommendations under review and recognises that the main objective of the Universal Periodic Review, of continual improvement of human rights on the ground, can only be met if countries continue to be active and keep an open mind in relation to the recommendations between reviews. This reflects our commitment to the role of national human rights institutions and NGOs.

We want the Universal Periodic Review process to work well and grow stronger. It will only be successful if it improves the human rights of people in the countries under review. That in turn means the proposal and acceptance of meaningful recommendations and the implementation of those recommendations in the countries concerned. In 2012, the UK led a cross-regional statement at the 19th session of the HRC on strengthening the Universal Periodic Review mechanism and establishing best practice. Thirty-nine countries signed up to the statement, which included a commitment to make no more than two clear, focused and implementable recommendations to each UN member state when they are under review. By reducing the number of recommendations and ensuring that they are precise, practical and constructive, we give each state the best chance of achieving successful implementation.

Standards have improved since the first cycle; however, the process is in its infancy and more work still needs to be done to encourage implementation. We have helped others by sharing our experience and offering advice and support where requested, for example in India where we supported projects to enable Indian civil society organisations to engage in India's Universal Periodic Review during 2012. We will continue to support wider work on the implementation of Universal Periodic Review recommendations through our Human Rights and Democracy Programme Fund and bilateral funding (see Sections II and III).

The UK also supports the work of the independent UN human rights treaty body system, made up of "treaty bodies" or "committees" that monitor compliance with international human rights treaties. These bodies form the heart of the international human rights protection system. They provide guidance on human rights standards and inform States Parties to the treaties what they must do to ensure that all people enjoy full human rights. Treaty body work plays an essential role in the protection and promotion of human rights, and its independence is crucial.

The committees are made up of experts. We continue to put forward experienced national candidates as we believe that the high calibre of members is central to the system's success. We choose our national candidates through an open and transparent selection process. In 2012, we nominated candidates for membership of the Human Rights Committee (also known as the Committee on Civil and Political Rights, or CCPR), the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT). All were successful. Following the 2012 elections, our current UK experts are:

Professor Malcolm Evans OBE: *successfully elected to the position of Chair of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture* (SPT). Malcolm Evans is also a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion or Belief (**www.osce.org/odihr/44455**) and has worked extensively with numerous international organisations on a wide range of human rights issues. He is Professor of Public International and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, University of Bristol.

Diane Mulligan OBE: *successfully elected to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD). One of the UK's leading campaigners for disabled people's rights worldwide, Diane Mulligan has worked on disability, diversity and international development issues since 1992. Diane's other appointments have included working with the Office for Disability Issues (establishing Equality 2025 – a body of publicly appointed disabled people that offers advice to Government), the British Medical Association (Patient Liaison Group and Equal Opportunities Committee), the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence and Sussex Probation Board.

Professor Sir Nigel Rodley KBE: *re-elected to the Human Rights Committee* (CCPR). Vice-chairperson for the committee in 2003–4 and again in 2009–10. Sir Nigel Rodley was also UN Special Rapporteur on Torture from 1993 to 2001. Sir Nigel has deep expertise and experience in the practice of international human rights law. He is Professor of Law and Chair of the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex.

Professor Patrick Thornberry CMG: *currently a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* (CERD). Patrick Thornberry specialises in the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, and racial discrimination. Patrick was also Chairman of the Minority Rights Group, the international human rights NGO. He is Emeritus Professor of International Law at Keele University.

We have actively contributed to strengthening the treaty body system in order to improve its effectiveness, in accordance with the report by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, on "Strengthening the United Nations Human Rights Treaty Body System". We want this intergovernmental process, set up by a UN General Assembly resolution in February, to deliver a more effective treaty body system that will encourage more states to engage, produce stronger state reporting, and as a result play an ever more effective role in protecting and promoting human rights. In 2012, we consulted key stakeholders, including treaty body committee members, NGOs and UK government departments that report to the

relevant committees, to help identify areas where changes in working practices could make the treaty bodies more effective and efficient, while ensuring that their independence is maintained. These consultations have been extremely useful as we formulate our approach ahead of forthcoming negotiations.

In 2012, we maintained our support for the operational structures of the UN, with the Department for International Development (DFID) providing £2.5 million voluntary funding for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on top of the UK's regular contribution to the UN budget. The FCO donated a further £471,000 to the OHCHR to support her work on the Working Group on Business and Human Rights, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and the Emergency Response Fund. This support enables the provision of technical assistance to states to support them in fulfilling their human rights obligations.

Country initiatives

Through the HRC and UNGA 3rd Committee, we called to account those countries which commit the most serious and widespread violations against their own citizens, including Belarus, Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (**DPRK**) and Syria. While not an exhaustive list, some of the most significant examples are set out below.

The international focus on **Syria** throughout 2012 and support for resolutions condemning human rights violations there, both in the HRC and the UNGA 3rd Committee, played an important role in maintaining pressure on the Syrian government. Key resolutions condemning human rights violations and abuses received unprecedented levels of support and, in creating the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI), the HRC ensured continued scrutiny and reporting on the human rights situation there. The 19th session of the HRC in early 2012 focused heavily on Syria, with an urgent high-level debate and resolution and a vote on an EU-led Syria resolution. The EU resolution was strong and well-supported. It included UK proposals on accountability, extended the mandate of the Independent Commission of Inquiry and requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to facilitate secure storage of evidence of human rights violations and abuses gathered by the COI. In practice this means that the UN will continue to undertake high-profile monitoring and evidence-gathering work, complementing UK objectives on accountability.

A Special Session of the HRC on "the deteriorating human rights situation in Syria and the recent killings in al Houleh" took place in June. The session passed a resolution asking the COI to undertake a special inquiry into the killings in al Houleh in order to gather evidence of those responsible for future judicial proceedings. Syria was also the dominant focus at the 20th session of the HRC. The resolution text underlined the HRC's strong stance on Syria.

At the 21st session of the HRC we saw a further renewal and reinforcement of the mandate of the COI on Syria, which included strong language on accountability for atrocities. At the UNGA 3rd Committee in November the UK worked with the main sponsors and other key partners to ensure increased support for another strong resolution on "Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic".

At the 19th session of the HRC we contributed to a successful renewal of the mandate, established in March 2011, of the Special Rapporteur on **Iran,** Dr Ahmed Shaheed. The Iranians continue to deny access to the Special Rapporteur but the resolution ensured that the UN human rights spotlight remained firmly on Iran for another year, with a slight increase of support demonstrating continued international concern. The annual UNGA 3rd Committee resolution on the "Situation of Human Rights in Iran" passed by a comfortable majority. The resolution covered in detail a wide range of human rights violations in Iran, including the rule of law, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and minority rights. It highlighted recent cases as examples of such violations, and areas of law, such as the draft Islamic Penal Code, which were of concern to the international community.

We were also able at the 19th session of the HRC to achieve a good outcome on the situation in Burma with the renewal of the Special Rapporteur's mandate ensuring continued independent reporting of the human rights situation there. Following extensive negotiations with the Burmese delegation during the 3rd Committee, the EU's annual resolution on the "Situation of Human Rights in Burma" passed by consensus. We now have a universally recognised text against which we can engage with the Burmese government and hold them to account. It also signals the willingness of the international community to work together with countries that show a serious and genuine desire to reform.

At the same session a significant resolution on "Promoting Reconciliation and Accountability in Sri Lanka" was adopted with UK co-sponsorship. This resolution signalled international desire to see substantive progress on reconciliation and accountability following the end of the war in early 2009, including through implementation of Sri Lanka's 2011 Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission recommendations. The resolution called on the government of Sri Lanka to implement the recommendations made in the report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission into allegations of violations and abuses in the conflict between 21 February 2002 and 19 May 2009, and to initiate credible action to ensure justice, equity, accountability and reconciliation. It also called for the OHCHR to provide technical assistance to the Sri Lankan government and to report back on this at its 22nd session in March 2013.

The EU/Japanese annual resolution in the UNGA 3rd Committee condemning the "Situations of Human Rights in the DPRK" passed without a vote for the first time. This followed a consensus resolution on the DPRK in the HRC earlier in 2012.

At the 21st session of the HRC we renewed the mandate of the "Independent Expert (IE) on the Human Rights Situation in Sudan". The renewed mandate contained strengthened language in order to ensure that the IE can monitor and report on specific human rights concerns in the country. Despite strong opposition from Sudan, we secured a mandate that should provide the IE with unhindered access. Whether this results in a change in the government of Sudan's approach on the ground remains to be seen. But we have a strong basis on which to urge the government of Sudan to cooperate with the UN human rights machinery, and grounds for tougher action in the HRC if it does not.

The African Group also led a resolution on South Sudan**,** which requested the High Commissioner to submit a written report on the progress of technical assistance and capacity-building in the field of human rights at the 23rd session of the HRC in June 2013.

We will work towards strengthening our focus on technical assistance to South Sudan in 2013.

Along with others, the UK sought the removal of the HRC's only country situation-specific agenda item, item 7 ("the Human Rights Situation in Palestine and the Other Occupied Arab Territories"), during the 2011 Review of the HRC. While there are serious human rights issues to be addressed in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), no other country has a similar agenda item and we therefore believe this reflects a disproportionate focus on Israel in comparison with other countries around the globe. The UK supported an independent fact-finding mission to investigate the human rights impact on Palestinians of Israeli settlement-building during the 19th session. We regret that following the 19th session Israel took the decision to cease cooperation with the HRC and its mechanisms. We want to see Israel engaging actively within the system rather than remaining isolated outside it.

Other initiatives in the HRC included a UK contribution to the EU-led resolution establishing a Special Rapporteur on Belarus. There were also two new Africa-led resolutions, one which condemned the violence in Mali and one which established a Special Rapporteur on Eritrea. We supported both these and were particularly pleased that the resolution on Eritrea signalled the first ever country-specific mandate established by an African country in the HRC. This increased engagement by the HRC demonstrates its value in addressing emerging situations and an increased readiness among its members to raise and support country-specific resolutions.

Thematic Issues

In the HRC and UNGA 3rd Committee, we focused on delivering strong resolutions on our priority thematic issues, as well as building support for key UK initiatives.

The Foreign Secretary launched the **Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative** (PSVI) in May 2012, and at the 20th session of the HRC session we secured support from 65 states for a cross-regional statement on this issue. At the UN General Assembly's annual High-level Segment, the Foreign Secretary and Zainab Bangura, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, co-hosted a ministerial meeting to raise awareness. We have since worked with UN agencies to begin elaboration of an international agreement on best practice in investigating and documenting acts of sexual violence. Throughout 2013 we will bring together our work with states and the UN in this field to build international support for globally agreed measures. The UK contributed £1 million to support the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict in support of this initiative.

In 2012, we also followed up on the 2011 UK/Brazil HRC resolution on "Promoting awareness, understanding and the application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through sport and the Olympic ideals". In February, Foreign Office Minister Jeremy Browne hosted a high-level HRC discussion on sport and human rights, which included presentations and statements from the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the London, Brazilian and Russian organising committees. All the participating states agreed that the UN could better use sport and events like the Olympic and Paralympic Games to

promote awareness of human rights. Simultaneously, we staged an exhibition during the HRC on “London 2012 and the International Inspiration Projects”. We estimate that over 7,000 ministers, ambassadors, government officials and members of the public will have seen in the exhibition how over 12 million children in over 20 countries were inspired by sport in the run-up to London 2012.

We worked with future hosts of the games, Russia, Brazil and the Republic of Korea, to develop and launch a joint communiqué on human rights and the Olympics. The communiqué (see case study on a joint communiqué) set out hosts’ commitments to harness the potential of sport through the Olympic and Paralympic Games to promote respect for human rights internationally, focusing on women’s rights, disability rights and building wider awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We have started to build on this effort with host nations to capitalise on the unifying effect of the Olympics and human rights, both within and outside the UN human rights system, as part of the broader UK Government Olympic legacy work.

Press conference with Foreign Secretary William Hague and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon speaking to the media in London, 27 July 2012

Case study: A Joint Communiqué between the United Kingdom, the Russian

London, 29 August 2012
1948 was the year in which the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace around the world. It was also the year in which the United Kingdom last hosted the Olympic Games, and the year which marked the origins of the Paralympic Games.

People witnessing and participating in the London Games in 1948 and today understand how sport can empower people – no matter who or where they are. The principles of the Olympic Charter promote non-discrimination, equality, inclusion, respect and mutual understanding. The very same principles are the bedrock of human rights.

Sport provides people with the chance to interact and join social networks. It is an important tool for reaching out to the underprivileged groups at risk of or facing discrimination. Through its contribution to economic growth and job creation, it can also help to revitalise disadvantaged areas as seen by the legacy of many high-profile sporting events.

The Olympic and Paralympic Games have long been recognised as a vehicle to foster development and strengthen education for children and young people; promote health and prevent disease, including the prevention of drug abuse; empower girls and women; foster the inclusion and well-being of persons with disabilities; and facilitate social inclusion, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. All of these activities are related to and supported by the fundamental principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

London 2012, Sochi 2014, Rio 2016 and Pyeongchang 2018 offer a valuable opportunity systematically to promote awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to a worldwide audience of billions, and demonstrate how the principles of the Olympic Charter relate to the declaration and can translate into all aspects of society. In acknowledgement of this opportunity, and as current and future host nations, we affirm our intention to use the Olympic and Paralympic Games:

- to promote awareness, understanding and the application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights among those watching and participating;
- as an opportunity to educate people on the values of respect, diversity, tolerance and fairness and as a means to combat all forms of discrimination, including racial discrimination, and promote an inclusive society;
- as a vehicle for empowering girls and women through the practice of sport, promoting women's equal inclusion throughout society, and combating discrimination and violence against women;
- to promote the equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities and foster their inclusion in all aspects of society, including sports; and
- to consider accessibility as an integral part of achieving sustainability.

The HRC also provided a forum for demonstrating the UK's leadership role and commitment to the business and human rights agenda. We played a leading role in the development and endorsement of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which set a global standard for addressing the role of business in respecting human rights. Throughout the HRC sessions we raised awareness of our national strategy, which will be launched in early 2013. In the 21st session of the HRC we worked with others to establish a panel discussion on this subject in 2013.

At the 19th session of the HRC, we saw consolidation of the significant progress made in 2011 towards a consensual international approach to further the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief. However, we were disappointed in September when we saw the re-opening of the debate on the controversial and inflammatory subject of "defamation of religions" following release of the controversial video "Innocence of Muslims" and the subsequent violence. Senior FCO Minister Baroness Warsi's participation in UNGA Ministerial Week and hard lobbying in the UNGA 3rd Committee contributed to the preservation of international consensus. The UK also worked to underpin the adoption by consensus of the EU's resolution on "freedom of religion or belief" and the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation's resolution on "combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief". Our efforts to maintain this consensus and move forward the international discussion on religious intolerance and freedom of religion or belief will continue in 2013.

The UN was also an important forum for demonstrating continued momentum towards the global abolition of the death penalty. The UK worked with others to build maximum support for the UNGA 3rd Committee biennial resolution calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. The resolution secured its highest level of support to date. It was passed by 111 votes to 41, with 34 abstentions (two votes more than the 2010 resolution). The positive direction of travel on this priority resolution is clear, and we will build upon this in 2013 within our broader strategy on the death penalty.

We pledged financial support to the Secretariat of the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and also contributed to the Special Fund for the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, which delivered its first projects in 2012. These are aimed at helping State Parties put into action the recommendations made by the subcommittee after a visit. The UK strongly supported the annual UNGA 3rd Committee resolution on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment**,** which was adopted by consensus and reflected better than previous resolutions the need to prevent, as well as respond effectively to, incidents of torture.

In the 20th session of the HRC, the UK was among 82 states that supported a strong consensus resolution on "Freedom of Expression on the Internet", jointly submitted by a cross-regional core group of Brazil, Nigeria, Tunisia, Turkey, Sweden and the United States. For the first time in an HRC resolution, it affirmed that freedom of expression applies equally online as it does offline. We will continue to use the HRC to promote the importance of freedom of expression on the Internet. We have worked hard to maintain existing standards on freedom of assembly and association, and co-sponsored an HRC resolution linking these rights to new information and communications technology. The UK also worked with other

Freedom Online Coalition member states to support the inclusion of human rights language in a UN Second Committee resolution on ICT and Development in December.

Furthering women's rights is a UK priority. We were therefore disappointed that the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) failed to adopt Agreed Conclusions language at its meeting in March. However, the position improved at the 3rd Committee in the autumn, when a series of strong resolutions were adopted by consensus. These resolutions focused on violence against women, non-discrimination and the participation of women in political transition. This included the first ever agreed reference in the UNGA 3rd Committee to reproductive rights.

Mainstreaming Human Rights in the UN

Mainstreaming human rights across the UN is fundamental to the promotion and protection of human rights. The UK is committed to this goal, including promoting human rights within the UN's development and peace and security agendas.

Throughout 2012, we worked to ensure that the UN Security Council has access to the necessary human rights information on which to base its decisions. The UK recognises that the protection and promotion of human rights plays a key role in international peace and security. We therefore continue actively to support opportunities for the High Commissioner to brief the Security Council on situations of human rights concern. In 2011, the High Commissioner briefed the Security Council more times than in the whole of the previous decade. The past year saw this level of engagement sustained. In July alone, the High Commissioner briefed the council on the human rights situations in Libya, Syria, South Sudan, Sudan and the OPTs. We welcome the High Commissioner's high level of engagement with the Security Council and the strong stance she has taken on issues such as the situation in Syria.

We have also worked to ensure that the Security Council establishes peacekeeping operations with the necessary human rights expertise and monitoring mandates. For example in the UK-led UNSC resolution on political transition in Somalia (UNSC 2067) we secured agreement on improving human rights monitoring in Somalia. In February we also participated in an informal "Arria formula" meeting of the Security Council with the heads of the human rights components of peacekeeping missions, enabling them to brief the Security Council directly on their work.

We remain committed to advancing issues in the Security Council such as Children in Armed Conflict, Protection of Civilians, and Women, Peace and Security. Through our membership of the Security Council Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict, we have worked to support the UN's work in this field. In 2012, the UN agreed action plans with the DRC, Somalia and Burma to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers. In the case of the DRC, it was the first action plan ever to contain measures to combat sexual violence against child soldiers.

Looking Ahead to 2013

The UK is a passionate, committed and, we believe, effective defender of human rights in the UN system, and in 2013 we will continue our work on priority thematic and country human rights challenges. We judge that the HRC and UNGA 3rd Committee are playing an ever stronger role in monitoring and addressing key human rights issues, including through initiatives led by states that have not previously played a visible role in these forums. However, there is still work to be done to persuade members that the UN should address human rights in specific countries. We do this by engaging with a wide range of interested parties and by ensuring that we work on the basis of accurate and timely human rights information from the ground.

We will maintain a strong focus in 2013 on our election to the HRC, to help ensure that we stay at the forefront of efforts to hold those responsible for crimes in Syria and elsewhere to account. We will also continue to focus in 2013 on the Universal Periodic Review and the treaty body strengthening process. We will also work with others to shape the UN system to be stronger and more effective, and therefore better at protecting and promoting human rights around the world.

SECTION II: The Human Rights and Democracy Programme

The Human Rights and Democracy Programme (HRDP) is a dedicated source of funding for human rights work overseas. It is run by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO's) Human Rights and Democracy Department in support of the FCO's human rights objectives. In the financial year 2012/13 funding totalled £6.5 million. We used this to support 71 projects, ranging in scale from £5,000 to £275,000. Most are delivered by civil society implementers working in coordination with the local British Embassy or High Commission.

An underlying objective of the HRDP is to promote the development of local civil society organisations. Even when we work with international implementers, we therefore strongly encourage them to use local partners in order to help expand their experience and develop their capacity.

In 2012, the HRDP had eight specific target areas, aligned with the FCO's human rights priorities. By focusing our effort in this way we avoid a scattergun approach and believe we achieve greater impact. The 2012 areas were:

- discrimination against women;
- freedom of expression;
- business and human rights;
- abolition of the death penalty;
- global torture prevention;
- freedom of religion or belief;
- elections; and
- human rights in the Commonwealth.

Projects were usually required to address one or more of these issues and to dovetail with the human rights work of the local UK Embassy or High Commission. In 2012, we also designated priority countries. These were linked to the countries of concern listed in the FCO's Annual Report. We particularly encouraged bidding for projects in these countries, and 51% of funding was eventually committed to them.

You will find examples of HRDP-funded projects throughout this report. Here are some examples of work the Programme supported in 2012.

Discrimination against women

In the Philippines we funded a project to empower and train women leaders to participate and run in the country's 2013 elections. Over 100 women leaders attended the training. In Brazil we supported "Safe and Friendly Cities for All", a joint initiative by UNICEF, UN Women and UN Habitat to increase safety and improve the quality of life for women, youth and children in Rio de Janeiro. The HRDP funding targeted increased access for women in low-income communities to support services for victims of gender violence.

Abolition of the death penalty

In Morocco we funded a series of legal seminars delivered by the International Bar Association and aimed at supporting and engaging the Moroccan legal profession in the

campaign for abolition. There was a high level of engagement between Moroccan national and local bar associations, international lawyers and academic experts on the different legal approaches which lawyers could use to challenge death penalty rulings and to advocate abolition in principle. In Kazakhstan we supported a project to draw up advice on new legislation to prevent an increase in the number of offences for which the death penalty can be applied.

Business and human rights

To generate understanding and implementation of the UN Guiding Principles (GPs) on Business and Human Rights, we funded a project to translate guidance material and practical examples on the GPs into foreign languages. This will help to offset the massive deficit in materials in languages other than English and to satisfy the demand from businesses, civil society and governments across the non-English-speaking world. In Cambodia we funded a project to raise awareness and understanding of the GPs among garment manufacturers, a sector of the economy that generates a lot of human rights concern.

Freedom of expression

In Brazil we supported personal safety training for journalists to help them create a more sustainable safety environment in the Brazilian media. In Mexico we are funding work to strengthen the investigative capacities of the Special Federal Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) through capacity-building. The project aims to support at least four stalled federal investigations of crimes against journalists. In Rwanda we funded work to promote greater contact between Rwandan civil society and the government. The aim is to facilitate discussions about government compliance with the UN Universal Periodic Review recommendations and to spark a debate in public opinion on issues related to democracy and the rule of law.

Global torture prevention

In 2012, we supported the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) to work in 11 target countries to promote the ratification and implementation of the Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol and the criminalisation of torture through the law and in practice. APT carried out activities in Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Lebanon, Nepal, Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Tajikistan, Tunisia and Uganda.

The HRDP is a flexible resource that allows us to deploy funding where it can have the most impact, and projects are not always linked to specific thematic priorities. For example, we contributed in 2012 to the Lifeline Fund, which is run by a consortium of international NGOs. Our contribution supported the fund's work to provide emergency assistance worldwide to human rights defenders at risk of repression and harassment in the course of their work.

Other sources of funding for human rights work

In addition to the HRDP, other FCO programme funds also support different elements of human rights and democracy work.

For example, the FCO-led Arab Partnership Participation Fund (APPF) works with reforming governments, parliaments, civil society and the media to help deliver our long-term vision of

a stable, prosperous Middle East and North Africa region. The APPF works in three main areas, all with close links to human rights:

- political participation;
- public voice and freedom of expression; and
- good governance (better access to justice and support for civil society initiatives to strengthen the rule of law transparency, integrity and tackling corruption).

The Reuniting Europe Programme also funds projects with human rights elements and supports Turkey and the Western Balkan countries with the reforms necessary for EU accession or closer partnership with the EU. It focuses on building stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the respect for and protection of minorities.

In addition, embassies and high commissions often support human rights projects through their own bilateral programme funds, and the FCO provides grant-in-aid funding for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Further information is available at: www.gov.uk/human-rights-and-democracy-programme

Case study: The Department for International Development's work on economic and social rights

Human rights are key to the Prime Minister's vision of a "golden thread" of factors that make open, fair and prosperous societies possible. The Department for International Development (DFID) works across the range of human rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural) to enable citizens to claim their rights, enabling the development of open societies and responsive and accountable institutions. To do this DFID works to strengthen civil and political rights through support for the rule of law and access to justice; by strengthening democratic governance; through empowering citizens, particularly girls and women, to drive their own development and to hold decision-makers to account; by promoting transparency; and helping to build effective and legitimate institutions. In 2012, UK aid continued to promote social and economic rights through the creation of more dynamic, open economies and employment opportunities; supporting safeguards to enable economic transactions and property rights; cash transfers to the poorest; and direct support for health, education, clean water and sanitation.

Girls and women

DFID has put girls and women at the heart of international development. We are committed to improving access to financial services for over 18 million women, providing secure access to land for 4.5 million women and helping 10 million women to access justice through the courts, police and legal assistance by 2015. In 2011/12, DFID provided at least 740,000 women with access to financial services, improved the rights to land and property for at least 210,000 women and helped 300,000 women and girls to access security and justice services.

Health

Every year around seven million children under five die needlessly, from malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases. Complications during pregnancy and childbirth kill 1,000 girls and women every day. DFID's work focuses on reaching the poorest with health services, by funding the provision of good-quality, cost-effective, basic health services by public, private and NGO providers. For example in 2011/12 UK aid was used to achieve immunisation of 12.3 million children worldwide.

Water and sanitation

Across the world, 2.5 billion people do not have access to sanitation and 780 million people do not have access to clean water. Inadequate access to water and sanitation is the principal cause of diarrhoeal disease, which kills 4,000 children every day and is the leading killer of children under five in Africa. During 2012, the UK recognised the right to sanitation as an element of the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, as provided for under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This is the same basis under which the UK recognised the right to water in 2006. In 2011/12, DFID provided 900,000 people with sustainable access to clean drinking water and 2 million people with sustainable access to improved sanitation.

Education
Educated children are able to take better care of their families and find greater employment opportunities in adulthood. An extra year of quality schooling lifts a country's annual economic growth by 1%. Yet more than 61 million children are out of primary school across the world. The fact that 39 million of these are girls is both a tragedy for the girls themselves and a disaster for development. Providing girls with an education gives them better opportunities to earn higher wages and to participate in the community; reduces the probability of child mortality by 5 to 10%; makes them more informed about health risks such as HIV and AIDS; means that they are more likely to marry later, have fewer, healthier and better-nourished children; and helps to break the cycle of poverty, as women put an average of 90% of their earnings back into the family and are more likely to send their own children to school. In 2011/12, DFID supported 2.9 million children to have primary education.

Economic empowerment
Economic growth is the most important means of raising incomes and reducing poverty in the developing world. In 2011/12, DFID helped 11.8 million people to access financial services and 800,000 people improve their rights to land and property.

SECTION III: Promoting British Values

British values centre on respect, tolerance, rule of law and freedom, and on the inherent dignity and equal rights of all individuals. We believe that people's desire for a better life in which they can fulfil their potential can only be satisfied in open and democratic societies that respond to popular will. That is why we seek greater political and economic freedom across the world, oppose tyranny and hold repressive regimes to account. It is also why we make respect for human rights a consistent theme that runs through Britain's foreign policy. It is something on which we will not compromise.

Democracy

The momentous changes across the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 can be viewed, at their core, as being about the people of the region demanding greater economic opportunity and political freedom (as outlined in 2011's Annual Human Rights Report **www.fcohrdreport.readandcomment.com/the-arab-spring**). The events that followed in 2012 reminded us that consolidating democracy is an ongoing process which requires institutions that allow it to grow, such as capable parliaments, responsible political parties, effective electoral bodies and an environment in which human rights such as freedom of expression and assembly can flourish.

It is a reflection of our values, and also in the interest of the UK, to support long-term, positive democratic reform. The experience of states across the world is that lasting stability and prosperity are based on consent and legitimacy, not repression. There is no single model of democracy. Every country will follow its own path, with its own system of governance, but respect for human rights and dignity is a universal value that must underlie all legitimate political systems.

Case study: Egypt – post-revolution

In 2011, we concluded that our key concerns were freedom of expression; freedom of association; mistreatment of religious minorities, protesters, journalists and human rights defenders; increased use of military trials for civilians; and allegations of inhuman or degrading treatment at the hands of the security services. Over the course of 2012, there have been a number of improvements in the human rights situation in Egypt. Most significantly, handover of power from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) to a democratically elected president took place in June and there is now greater space for public debate. Parliamentary elections are scheduled to begin on 27 April 2013.

However, issues of concern remain. Foremost of these are women's rights, freedom of religion and freedom of expression. Women, who played a key role in the revolution, have seen little improvement in their rights. We remain concerned about reports of increasingly violent sexual assault and treatment of women, and we have raised this with the Egyptian government. The transition period has also seen continued sectarian violence. The Prime Minister raised the protection of religious minorities during his meeting with President Mursi on 26 September. Through project funds, we have supported a project to create a partnership between mainstream Muslim and Christian groups to train mixed teams in conflict resolution and mediation skills.

The new constitution agreed by referendum in December lacks clarity on certain human rights elements. While it gives Muslims, Christians and Jews the right to practise their religion, it does not give the same freedom to other religions and minority sects.

More positively, there is now greater space for public debate in Egyptian society since the fall of Mubarak. We note that during the protests over the draft constitution at the end of 2012, the police initially acted with more restraint than previously and the army made clear that they would not intervene. But we are concerned about limits on freedom of expression in Egypt, including the increase in prosecutions of bloggers and activists, closing of satellite television stations, and lack of clarity on the definition of blasphemy, which is illegal under the new constitution.

We are also concerned about ongoing harassment and intimidation of trade union officials as well as the article in the new constitution which prohibits more than one trade union per profession. Trade unions have an important role to play in developing a healthy democracy. Through the joint-funded FCO–DFID Arab Partnership Fund, we are supporting a project to assist Egypt's trade unions to develop and promote economic and social policy recommendations.

Elections

Elections are crucial to the democratic process and to delivering long-term, stable democratic outcomes. Support for good electoral process and practice is therefore central to the FCO's policy on democracy. We provide this largely by giving financial, technical and personnel support to election observation missions and democratic institutions to promote the peaceful transition of power and minimise opportunities for fraud. In this we work closely

with DFID, led by a joint policy on election assistance. In 2011–12 DFID provided support to four countries to help them hold freer and fairer elections (Tanzania, Nigeria, Zambia and Yemen).

Much of our election observation support is done through international organisations, in particular the EU, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Commonwealth. These organisations' election observation missions consider the strengths and weaknesses of an electoral process and make independent recommendations for improvements. In 2012, the EU observed elections in Senegal, Algeria, Sierra Leone, Libya and Timor-Leste, helping to achieve largely peaceful and successful elections in each case. The FCO supported UK observers for OSCE election observation missions in Kazakhstan, Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Serbia, Montenegro, Ukraine and the USA.

As part of discussions to modernise the Commonwealth which took place throughout 2012, Commonwealth Heads of Government agreed that election observation was an area where the Commonwealth adds significant value and concluded that this work should be strengthened. In 2012, the Commonwealth observed elections in Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Lesotho and Ghana. The UK, through the FCO and DFID, provided approximately £7 million in support of the Ghanaian elections. This included a training programme for 16,000 police and other service personnel on electoral procedures to ensure, for example, impartial conduct at polling stations. The elections were peaceful and deemed by the observers to be free, fair and transparent.

Domestic election observers also play an important role in monitoring the conduct of elections. For instance, in Libya, the Arab Partnership Fund supported training of nearly 900 local election observers, including women and former revolutionary fighters, for Libya's July 2012 elections, the first to be held after the fall of Muammar Qadhafi and the first in the country in 47 years. The UK also helped set up an Observer Control Centre to provide observer groups with a central office in which comments and observations could be coordinated. The observers were able to report on an election which, despite some security incidents, they determined was fair overall, and in which the majority of Libyans were able to vote without intimidation.

A key pillar of the FCO's and DFID's joint policy on election support involves offering long-term engagement between elections, as well as during them, with those whose effective participation is essential for a peaceful democratic result, including parliamentarians, electoral bodies, the judiciary, political parties, the media and civil society.

Our response to the elections in Egypt, where the UK is committed to supporting the process of political transition, was an example of this approach being put into practice. Egypt went to the polls on three separate occasions in 2012: a parliamentary election in January, a presidential election in May and a referendum on the new constitution in December. Through the FCO Arab Partnership Fund, we provided early financial and public support to the Carter Center monitoring mission, one of the few international organisations allowed to observe the elections in May. We were also the only donor to fund the observation of the December referendum by the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, the single independent observer. Embassy staff observed at polling stations when permitted by the authorities. All three elections passed peacefully and without significant allegations of

irregularity. We are now working to support media training in Egypt to facilitate impartial electoral coverage and to provide peer support to nascent political parties and parliamentarians, in particular female candidates. We will continue to promote a free and open political system in Egypt by providing support for a credible and impartial assessment of the presidential elections and constitutional referendum.

In 2013, the UK will continue to support electoral processes both bilaterally and through our work with international organisations.

Case study: Bangladesh – political violence

Forty years after independence, Bangladesh's political culture remains confrontational and violent. In 2012, NGOs estimate that 169 people were killed and over 17,000 were injured in political violence. The violence is not sectarian nor, generally, communal. Violence and vandalism have been an accepted means of political expression in a country where democratic institutions appear weak. There are no significant constraints on freedom of assembly, with frequent nationwide enforced strikes (hartals), many of which have resulted in violence and vandalism. The opposition allege law enforcement officials have used force during peaceful demonstrations. The victims are often innocent bystanders: for example, the elderly man burnt alive on a bus during an opposition enforced hartal, and Biswajit Das, a 24-year-old tailor, killed in front of cameras because he was perceived to be an opposition activist.

Political participation is a crucial element of any democracy. The UK is committed to working with all stakeholders in Bangladesh to support the development of a stable, democratic, and prosperous society. The last parliamentary elections of December 2008 were acclaimed as an important step forward for Bangladeshi democracy, returning power to elected representatives. But the cyclical pattern of pre-election violence means that Bangladesh faces the prospect of worsening political violence in the lead-up to the next elections, due by January 2014. The British Government is supporting the Bangladesh Election Commission with its election security preparations; we are also helping civil society to track election-related violence, and mitigate this through community engagement. This is in addition to ongoing support to strengthen democratic practices and institutions, including parliament, and in addition to regular political dialogues in which we urge all parties to respect the rule of law.

Case study: Swaziland – elections without political parties

The coming year will be critical for governance and democracy in Swaziland, sub-Saharan Africa's last absolute monarchy.

Although Swaziland has a parliament, with elections due in 2013, there is no effective democracy. The King has the power summarily to appoint and dismiss ministers, all parliamentary candidates require the approval of their chief (who is dependent on the monarch for wealth and power) and while political parties are not forbidden, they are banned from participating in elections. All candidates must run as independents.

During Swaziland's Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council in October 2011, the UK recommended that Swaziland clarify the status of political parties and allow multi-party elections. This recommendation was rejected by the Swazi government in March 2012 during the formal adoption of the Universal Periodic Review report. We will continue to urge the Swazi government to reconsider the status of political parties and allow them to operate freely.

Swaziland continues to suffer from a range of governance problems which adversely impact human rights and inhibit the country's social and economic development and its ability to attract much-needed foreign investment. The judicial system has suffered repeated crises; the Suppression of Terrorism Act has been used to prevent legitimate expression of political views; peaceful protests have been disrupted and in some cases excessive force used against protesters. The absence of clearly documented land rights has prevented small farmers from developing their land. Efforts to amend Swaziland's laws to prevent domestic violence and to improve the legal status of women have made little progress.

Jointly with EU partners, we will continue to press the Swazi government to tackle these crucial human rights concerns. The British High Commission in Pretoria has in addition provided support to Swazi non-government organisations to develop their capacity and to hold the government to account more effectively, including ensuring independence of the judiciary, freedom of association, establishment of a fully functioning Human Rights Commission and improvement in the legal status of women.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Parliaments play a key role in making democracy work. Responsible and representative political parties are essential to the development of a democratic culture and effective political systems and provide the foundation for peaceful resolution of political conflict.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the FCO to support the development of political parties and democratic institutions. WFD works to strengthen parliamentary capacity through training, sharing expertise and building institutional capacity, and by supporting members of parliament and parliamentary staff. Working with, and through, UK political parties, it seeks also to strengthen multi-party systems, both on a sister-party and cross-party basis.

In 2012, the foundation received an annual grant-in-aid from the FCO of £3.5 million, and DFID confirmed a new accountable grant of £6 million (£2 million a year for three years). WFD also accesses other sources of funding for individual programmes.

During 2012, WFD ran 20 country and regional programmes supporting parliaments, civil society and multi-party systems in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and Asia. They included eight country programmes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Pakistan and Ukraine and six regional programmes in the Western Balkans, East Africa, the Middle East and North Africa.

Half of WFD's programme budget is shared with UK political parties to enable them to develop capacity-building programmes with sister parties overseas. Between them they delivered approximately 60 programmes in 2012, including projects on party and policy development, communication and campaigning strategies, media skills and grassroots political work.

Supporting and promoting human rights underpins WFD's work. In 2012, they launched a new "Handbook on Human Rights and Parliaments" in partnership with the East Africa Legislative Assembly, which is now well placed to work with civil society and national legislatures to support human rights in the region.

In Kenya WFD helped the parliament's Centre for Parliamentary Studies and Training to develop a training curriculum, which was then subject to international peer review. More than 60 parliamentary staff were trained. A new three-year parliamentary strengthening programme was developed to assist the country's transition to a bicameral parliament in 2013 and the devolution of powers to new county assemblies.

In Ukraine, WFD is supporting a Ukrainian-led civil society initiative which seeks to address weaknesses in the country's democratic process by fostering public debate about policy priorities, drawing these into a "People's Charter" and feeding the results back to the public and decision-makers. WFD will also seek to establish links between this civil society programme and its ongoing programme with the Ukrainian parliament.

Two WFD delegations visited the Turks and Caicos Islands during 2012 for consultations with the political parties on a new Political Activities Ordinance, and later to conduct training to help the parties comply with the new ordinance and to develop new campaign methods in the run-up to the November elections.

WFD worked with the Tunisian Constituent Assembly in 2012 to strengthen parliamentary organisation and procedures, as well as accountability mechanisms and legislative and constitutional drafting. They also worked with Tunisian political parties on party structures and engaging with women and youth. A new three-year programme includes multi-party and party-to-party support to strengthen political parties in parliament. It will also train newly elected parliamentarians and develop a parliamentary code of conduct.

In 2013, WFD will continue to work on and develop its multi-year programmes and to develop new initiatives, including working in Burma to assist the country in its democratic transition with a programme now under development.

Alongside the work of the WFD, DFID continued to support parliamentary strengthening activities in 2012, focusing on helping parliaments to enhance their law-making capacity, represent citizens' interests and hold governments to account. These form part of a broader package of programmes to strengthen democratic governance and dovetail with wider efforts to improve local accountability through support to civil society, political parties, the media and the electoral process.

Freedom of expression

The FCO sees freedom of expression as an essential element of democracy and human rights. It is fundamental to the democratic process, to good governance and to exposing corruption and human rights violations. It may legitimately be restricted only in certain prescribed circumstances. The Foreign Secretary's 2012 statement to mark World Press Freedom Day stressed the importance of protecting freedom of expression and the free flow of information and ideas, both online and offline, which the Foreign Secretary sees as "cornerstones of a stable and prosperous society". In his video message to mark the day, the then FCO Minister Jeremy Browne also drew attention to the importance the British Government attaches to freedom of the media across the world and paid tribute to local journalists and media representatives who put themselves in danger to document human rights violations.

Freedom of expression remained limited in many countries in 2012. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the imprisonment of journalists worldwide reached a record high in 2012, with Turkey, Syria and Eritrea ranking amongst the worst offenders. In Syria, both Syrian and foreign journalists and their offices were targeted by both regime and armed opposition forces. In Eritrea, 28 journalists were imprisoned; none have enjoyed the right to a fair trial or access to a lawyer. The CPJ estimates that by the end of 2012 at least 132 journalists were being held around the world on charges of terrorism, treason and subversion. High-profile events in Azerbaijan, such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the Eurovision Song Contest, shone the spotlight on reports of journalists critical of the government who have been intimidated, beaten or arrested. Media freedom continued to be a particular issue in Tajikistan, where social media and other websites were blocked at various times throughout the year. In Kazakhstan, the Almaty public prosecutor filed lawsuits against nine newspapers, more than 20 Internet publications and two new television channels in November, charging them with inciting social hatred against the state and classifying them as extremist organisations. A series of short trials in December found them guilty and placed a ban on their activities.

The FCO continues to press for existing obligations to be upheld, working both bilaterally and with like-minded governments, UN Special Rapporteurs and through our membership of international organisations.

Bilaterally, we engage directly on freedom of expression with individual countries, raising individual cases where appropriate. In Afghanistan, we are seeking to ensure that Afghan civil society partners are active in the consultation process on the draft media law run by the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture. The then Culture Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, raised concerns about freedom of expression in discussions with Chinese State Councillor Liu Yandong during the UK–China People to People Dialogue on 16 April, highlighting the

cases of Ai Weiwei, Chen Wei and Chen Xi. Continuing concerns about restrictions on freedom of expression were raised during human rights dialogues with China in July and September. In Vietnam, we continued to support the development of the media sector through a range of activities, including a workshop aimed at improving the legislation governing official spokespeople. We participated in a dialogue with the government of Ethiopia on the ban on the private use of Skype, which was subsequently repealed. In both Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, constraints on media freedom have led to frequent representations to the authorities. Our Embassy in Kazakhstan has funded training programmes for journalists, most recently on criminal justice and prisoners' rights.

Freedom of expression also remained a priority area for our Human Rights and Democracy Programme. Under this we supported a number of projects including one in India and Sri Lanka to help local civil society build strategic alliances to strengthen freedom of expression on the Internet across the region (subsequently expanded into other countries), and one in Colombia where we supported the implementation of recommendations by the Rapporteurs for Freedom of Expression of the UN and the Organisation of American States.

In the international arena we continued our work in the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe to protect the erosion of existing obligations on freedom of expression. At the Human Rights Council in February, then FCO Minister Jeremy Browne highlighted the importance of freedom of expression, citing the tragic deaths of Marie Colvin and Remi Ochlik while reporting with great bravery from Homs in Syria – a reminder of the risks that journalists take to report the truth. He also condemned the arrest and detention of Mazen Darwish, Director of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, and called for his immediate release. Mr Dawish remains in prison and has allegedly been tortured. In June, the UK was among 82 states which supported a resolution affirming that the right to freedom of expression applies online in the same way as it does offline. At the Human Rights Council in July we joined 56 other states in supporting a cross-regional statement on the safety of journalists. In the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly in December, we supported the inclusion of language in a resolution on ICT for Development affirming that freedom of expression and the free flow of information, ideas and knowledge are essential for development in the digital age.

We continued to work closely with the Council of Europe in 2012, including by making freedom of expression on the Internet a priority for our chairmanship of the Council of Ministers (November 2011–May 2012). A new strategy on Internet governance, adopted in March, contains more than 40 action points to protect and promote human rights, the rule of law and democracy online. During the ministerial debate at the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe in May, the Foreign Secretary highlighted the importance of guarding against the growing trend of using the Internet as a means of political repression. The Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) agreed at their November meeting that the elaboration of standards for the protection of journalists was a matter of urgency.

We saw growing evidence in 2012 of states imposing controls over the Internet: pulling the plug at times of political unrest, invading the privacy of net users and criminalising and legislating against legitimate online activity. At the Budapest Cyber Conference in October, the Foreign Secretary gave a keynote speech in which he affirmed that "an open Internet is

the only way to support security and prosperity for all". Our work to support freedom of expression through the Freedom Online Coalition intensified in 2012. This is an international coalition of like-minded states committed to working together through diplomatic channels to end measures which restrict Internet freedom, and to support individuals whose freedom of expression these measures curtail. Its aim is to engage with other governments, regional organisations, international institutions, civil society and other stakeholders such as businesses and academics to reinforce our efforts. Joint action by coalition members included lobbying to raise awareness among other governments about the potential dangers to freedom of expression posed by moves to exert more control over the Internet. In Vietnam, for example, the coalition voiced concern about a draft Internet Regulation Decree, resulting in significant improvements to the legislation. Kenya hosted the 2nd Freedom Online Conference in Nairobi in September, attended by more than 430 delegates. The Internet as a driver of economic development rather than of repression was a key theme. Tunisia joined the coalition and will host the next conference as chairman in 2013. Latvia and Costa Rica also joined in 2012. The coalition also met to agree strategies for supporting freedom online at international meetings, such as those of the Human Rights Council, the OSCE and the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT).

The UK will continue to play an active part in this group during 2013 and sees the diverse geographical spread of its members as one of its strengths.

The FCO's Freedom of Expression on the Internet Expert Group, now chaired by Senior Minister of State Baroness Warsi, continued to meet in 2012. This brings together UK-based experts from NGOs, academia, the media and the business sector, who advise officials on issues surrounding freedom of expression on the Internet. This in turn informs our strategy at international meetings on Internet governance, such as the Internet Governance Forum in Baku in November and the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) held in Dubai in December. In March, the group discussed FCO policy objectives in relation to freedom of expression on the Internet; in October they offered advice on a campaign to support online journalists.

Freedom of expression, including on the Internet, will remain a priority for the FCO in 2013. We will engage with a broader range of countries, taking into account concerns they may have about the tension between freedom of expression and issues such as public order or morality, but seeking ways to work together more effectively. The challenge continues to be to reframe the debate firmly around rights rather than restrictions. To do this, we will work bilaterally and with regional organisations such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE, engage with businesses, civil society and states, including more closely with those in the Freedom Online Coalition, support the extension of voluntary principles for business and fund projects to promote and protect freedom of expression.

Case study: Rwanda – freedom of association and expression

Progress on social and economic rights in Rwanda since the genocide in 1994 remains impressive. One million Rwandans have been lifted out of poverty since 2007. There is continued progress in advancing the rights of women and girls. Social discrimination based on sexual orientation continues, but the legal framework remains non-discriminatory. The UK remains concerned over the constraints on political space in Rwanda, and is also disturbed about evidence of Rwandan support for the M23 militia who have committed human rights abuses in eastern DRC.

Freedom of association
Unregistered political parties experience harassment. The law transferring responsibility for registering parties to the Rwanda Governance Board has yet to be passed. The ability of political parties to secure registration ahead of the 2013 parliamentary elections will be a key test.

Freedom of expression
Rwanda exercises close control over the media, partly due to the role of the media in fomenting the 1994 genocide. We are encouraging a more open media environment. Laws allowing self-regulation of the media have yet to be enacted. Defamation remains a criminal offence. We are studying the conviction of opposition politician Victoire Ingabire who was sentenced to eight years for conspiracy to undermine the established government and genocide denial. We will continue to follow the case if she launches an appeal. We are encouraged by the Supreme Court's decision to reduce the sentences of two journalists convicted in 2010 for threatening state security, genocide ideology and defamation against President Kagame. The Supreme Court overturned the genocide ideology and divisionism charges. Rwanda has signalled that it will revise the genocide ideology law, a move we support.

Conflict in DRC
There is credible and compelling evidence of Rwandan support for the M23 militia who have committed human rights abuses in eastern DRC, including the recruitment of child soldiers, sexual violence and the murder and displacement of civilians. The M23 militia's assault on Goma in November displaced an additional 140,000 people in and around the town. In this context, the International Development Secretary decided not to release £21 million as general budget support to Rwanda in November. We are encouraging the Rwandan government with other states in the region to help resolve the conflict in DRC, including through support for a regional framework agreement, and we will review the issue of general budget support in 2013. We continue to use our development programme to support the poorest Rwandans.

The UK has an ongoing dialogue with the Rwandan government on these and other issues, including alleged irregular detention and torture of civilians by security forces.

Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders are individuals or groups who act to promote or protect human rights. They include NGOs, lawyers, journalists, academics and politicians. They frequently risk harassment, arrest, detention or death for their activities. As well as surveillance and physical attacks by police and security forces, governments deploy tactics such as restrictions on funding, restrictive registration processes, travel bans and campaigns of defamation and slander against these individuals. In Russia, legislation categorises NGOs as "foreign agents" if they accept funding from overseas.

The UK continued to support "Lifeline: the Embattled NGO Assistance Fund" in 2012, bringing to £500,000 the funding we have made available since it was established in 2011. The fund provides emergency assistance and small grants to human rights defenders who face repression and harassment because of their work. By the end of 2012 it had provided some 130 civil society organisations with either emergency assistance or advocacy support, allowing them to respond rapidly to crackdowns on civil society, to continue their work and to draw international attention to continuing threats. In September, the UK took part in an event hosted by US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in support of Lifeline at the margins of the UN General Assembly. We also joined other Freedom Online Coalition members in supporting a new fund, the Digital Defenders Partnership, which supports human rights defenders online. This fund is due to begin seeking bids in early 2013.

We continued in 2012 to take action in support of human rights defenders in international and regional forums such as the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. We continue strongly to support the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders. We commend the part that Special Rapporteurs played in raising the alarm about arbitrary detentions of those defending human rights linked to the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression. We took part in a session on female human rights defenders during the June Human Rights Council, and at the September Council we supported a resolution on freedom of assembly and association.

In the OSCE, we supported an EU intervention at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in September. With EU partners, we have also raised concerns about individual human rights defenders, including about a clampdown in Kazakhstan on opposition activists; news of a court decision to release human rights defender Yevgeniy Zhovtis was welcome, however. We also expressed deep concerns about reports of continued mistreatment of political prisoners in Belarus and reiterated the EU's call on the Belarusian authorities immediately to release and rehabilitate all political prisoners. We remain committed to working with and protecting human rights defenders by implementing the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders.

Ministers and officials have raised individual cases of persecution or harassment with host governments, and our staff overseas have observed trials and public gatherings. In Cambodia, the UK has been involved in EU support for human rights defenders, including raising the case of radio station owner Mam Sonando, sentenced to 20 years in October for criticising the government. There are 31 human rights defenders imprisoned in Cambodia. In August, then FCO Minister Jeremy Browne met the President of Fiji and underlined the importance of a strong civil society and respect for human rights.

For his first overseas visit of 2012, the Foreign Secretary chose to visit Burma, where he called for the release of remaining political prisoners. Several hundred political prisoners were released in 2012, including prominent 88 Generation and ethnic leaders, in a continuation of the trend from 2011. The Burmese government also enacted a number of laws vital to human rights defenders, including on freedom of association and assembly. Despite these changes, however, many still face intimidation and prosecution. The UK Government provides small grants to innovative Burmese NGO projects to advance women's rights and support for political prisoners; it also provides capacity development for Burmese civil society organisations.

In April, then FCO Minister Jeremy Browne raised the cases of a number of human rights defenders in a letter to the Chinese Ambassador, including imprisoned lawyers Gao Zhisheng, Ni Yulan (whose state of health was of concern) and her husband Dong Jiqin. Visits to Afghanistan by FCO Ministers Alistair Burt in March and Senior Minister of State Baroness Warsi in October included meetings with a number of Afghan human rights interlocutors such as the Deputy Minister for Women's Affairs, Chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and civil society figures. They discussed a wide range of issues, including challenges on women's rights, governance, the political process and security. In December, the Foreign Secretary addressed imprisoned Iranian lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh directly in a video message. He assured her that the UK will continue to hold the Iranian government to account for her treatment.

Case study: Ethiopia – the Charities and Societies Proclamation

In February 2009, the Ethiopian government issued the Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSP). This imposes strict rules on the registration and regulation of both domestic and international civil society organisations (CSO) operating in Ethiopia. Under its provisions, no CSO working on governance, human and minority rights or conflict prevention may receive more than 10% of its funding from foreign sources.

In December 2009, the Charities and Societies Agency (CSA), which is responsible for implementing the CSP, froze the bank accounts of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and the Ethiopian Human Rights Council. Both organisations appealed against the decision, saying that they had received the overseas funding in question before the CSP came into force (the law is not retroactive). Their appeals were rejected. The work of both has been significantly curtailed in consequence. In its July 2012 annual report, the CSA stated that it had ordered the closure of seven CSOs and planned to close a further two and issue warning letters to an additional 476 because they had breached provisions in the CSP.

The Ethiopian government has said that the CSP is an attempt to improve the regulation of CSOs working in Ethiopia to strengthen the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of civil society. Human rights groups however believe that the law is an attempt to stifle dissent. Human Rights Watch say the law is "inherently abusive of basic human rights" and Amnesty International has described its impact on Ethiopia's civil society as "crippling".

The British Government believe that a regulated, transparent CSO sector is in Ethiopia's development interest but is concerned that the CSP undermines the confidence and effectiveness of Ethiopia's civil society, and has caused significant numbers of CSOs to end important governance and human rights-related work. A study funded by DFID has suggested that survivors of gender-based violence in Ethiopia have found it harder to access relevant services since the introduction of the CSP because of the reduced ability of CSOs working in this field to provide protection and redress.

British ministers continue to make the case at the most senior levels of the Ethiopian government for a vibrant and active civil society. By robustly gathering evidence, funding studies into the achievements of civil society and honest dialogue, British officials in Ethiopia are demonstrating the harmful impact that some aspects of the CSP are having. The UK also funds the multi-donor Civil Society Support Programme (administered by the British Council), which seeks to build the capacity of Ethiopia's civil society.

Criminal Justice and the Rule of Law

The rule of law is a central component of the Prime Minister's vision of the "golden thread" of factors that make open, fair and prosperous societies possible:

"*What I call the building blocks of democracy [are] the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law, the rights of individuals, a free media, free association, a proper place in society for the army, strong political parties and a proper, rich civil society. These things together make up a golden thread that can be found woven through successful countries and sustainable economies all over the world*" (David Cameron, 2012).

We continued in 2012 to see the impact on people in countries where the rule of law does not operate. The UK Government worked to repair this deficit, including through projects funded through the Conflict Pool and engagement on counter-terrorism. DFID is known for its groundbreaking work on electoral assistance and safety, security and access to justice. In 2011–12, the Department provided support to 16.2 million people to give them choice and control over their development and to hold decision-makers to account, helped four countries to hold freer and fairer elections and secured improved access to security and justice services for 300,000 women and girls.

Events in Syria were been particularly worrying. Arbitrary arrest, extrajudicial killings and torture have been widespread and carried out with impunity. We have provided support to the people of Syria to ensure that these acts are documented so that the perpetrators can be held to account. We have also been at the forefront of calls for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

The FCO's work on criminal justice and human rights focused on promoting good practice in two areas: the abolition of the death penalty and preventing torture. We also rolled out to all government departments the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) Human Rights Guidance published in 2011. This guidance recognises that we often need to work with countries or institutions where we have concerns about compliance with human rights standards, but seeks to ensure that British Government assistance to foreign police, military services, judiciaries, security forces and others in the field of security and justice strengthens rather than undermines human rights and democracy. It applies to all security and justice assistance carried out by UK government departments and agencies overseas.

The death penalty

In December, the UN General Assembly voted by the largest margin yet recorded in favour of establishing a worldwide moratorium on the death penalty, confirming the trend towards global abolition. The resolution attracted 111 votes in favour, with 41 against and 34 abstentions. (In 2010, the vote was 109 in favour, 41 against and 35 abstentions.) Countries voting in favour for the first time included the Central African Republic, Chad, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Tunisia. While not binding, the growing support for this resolution, which is tabled every two years, is indicative of strengthening world opinion against the use of the death penalty.

The UK Government opposes the death penalty in all circumstances. We consider that its use undermines human dignity, that there is no conclusive evidence that it has any value as a deterrent and that any miscarriage of justice is irreversible and irreparable. The Government's Strategy for Abolition of the Death Penalty, which was updated in October 2011, sets out three goals. We aim to increase the number of abolitionist countries or countries with a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. We want to secure further restrictions on its use in countries where it is still applied, and reductions in the numbers of executions. Finally, when the death penalty is applied, we aim to ensure that EU minimum standards on its use are met. These include the right to a fair trial and a prohibition on the execution of juveniles.

We continue to work with other countries through bilateral initiatives and through the EU and UN. Participation in high-level meetings at the UN in New York and lobbying in capitals around the world contributed to the increase in the number of countries supporting the General Assembly resolution.

Together with EU partners, we have also raised the death penalty with a number of countries that continue to use it, or have considered doing so. These included Belarus, Iran, Iraq, the Gambia, the United States and Japan.

In both Iran and Iraq, there was an alarming rise in the number of executions in 2012. The Gambia carried out nine executions in August following a moratorium which had lasted 27 years. India also carried out an execution in November following an eight-year moratorium. Together with EU partners we made strong representations in all these countries, as well as in Belarus (the only country in Europe to retain the death penalty), the United States and Japan. In Japan, which carried out seven executions, Minister for Asia Hugo Swire also issued a statement expressing his concern, and our embassy in Tokyo encouraged regular working-level contacts with Japanese experts and civil society to promote abolition.

The US continues to be one of the Government's top-five death penalty priority countries, and throughout 2012 we raised the death penalty regularly with individual states, including specific cases, both bilaterally and through the EU. The use of the death penalty in the US is declining steadily. Of the 42 executions carried out in 2012, three quarters took place in only four states: Arizona, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas. In April, Connecticut became the fifth state in five years to abolish the death penalty. California narrowly voted to retain the death penalty in November, although no executions have been carried out in the state since 2006. As part of our overall engagement in California, the UK funded a conference to raise awareness of alternatives to the death penalty. The UK also supported the work of abolitionist groups, funded targeted training for US capital defence lawyers and supported a visit to the US by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Abolition of the Death Penalty.

In China, our project work has established useful channels of communication between UK experts and their Chinese counterparts, encouraging discussion on alternatives to the death penalty. China does not publish figures for executions but it is believed to carry out more than any other state in absolute terms. In the last few years, however, significant new judicial restrictions have been put in place on the use of the death penalty, which reliable local sources indicate have led to the number of executions reducing by approximately half since 2006. We continue to support project work by leading academics who work with

judges and prosecutors to explore ways to reduce and restrict the scope and application of the death penalty in China.

The FCO works closely with the Foreign Secretary's Advisory Group on Human Rights, which includes an Advisory Sub-group on the Death Penalty. The sub-group, which is made up of experts drawn from academia, the legal profession, NGOs and Parliament, provides the FCO with expert advice to help shape the implementation of our strategy. The sub-group met twice during the year. Discussions focused on how we might make progress towards abolition in China, Iran, Iraq, Japan and the United States.

The FCO also works closely with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the Abolition of the Death Penalty, chaired by Baroness Stern, which works with parliamentarians worldwide to bring about abolition. The FCO supports the APPG's work and has in recent months helped to organise lobbying visits by its members to the Far East and the United States, where local posts arranged contacts with key local representatives.

On 9 October, we marked the tenth World Day Against the Death Penalty when Senior Minister of State Baroness Warsi spoke in support of our position at an event in the Houses of Parliament attended by representatives of over 30 London embassies. Because of its proximity to the vote at the UN General Assembly, we used this meeting to lobby those present about their country's vote at the UN and we believe that this event contributed actively to the positive result. Many of our embassies and high commissions also used World Day Against the Death Penalty to promote awareness of our aim of global abolition, delivering our message through public events, blogs, video messages, podcasts and media articles.

In the past year we have also supported over a dozen civil society projects on the death penalty. These included projects in Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan, with outreach to Egypt, Algeria and other countries affected by the Arab Spring. Through our support we were able to encourage increasing debate on abolition in the Middle East and North Africa. We supported a major regional conference in Rabat at which differing interpretations of Sharia Law relating to the death penalty were discussed.

In 2013, we will continue to implement our strategy and its three goals. Our lobbying in advance of the UN General Assembly Resolution on the Moratorium on the Use of the Death Penalty helped us to identify countries which may be prepared to review their death penalty policy. We will seek to focus on these, offering where appropriate to share the UK's political and technical experience on abolition. We also expect again to support a number of projects on the death penalty in countries around the world.

Case study: The Gambia – the death penalty

In August, The Gambia broke a 27-year moratorium on the death penalty when nine prisoners on death row were executed in secret. The executions were condemned by the international community, including the UK and The Gambia's neighbours in West Africa. As a result the moratorium was restored several weeks later and there have been no executions since. There is a risk that it might be suspended again depending upon a rise or fall in the rate of violent crime. The episode served to highlight the deterioration in human rights in The Gambia, which is attracting increasing international concern. During the immediate aftermath, several journalists were arrested for trying to apply for a permit to protest against the executions.

President Jammeh makes frequent calls for a crackdown on crime. His zero tolerance on homosexuality led to the arrest of 20 individuals for "attempting to commit an unnatural act". Other sections of society are also targeted. For example, attacks against the media increased in 2012. Newspapers and radio stations regularly face harassment and are sometimes closed without warning or explanation. Journalists and broadcasters can be detained on loose interpretations of the criminal law. In one case, two journalists were arrested for sedition when they applied for a permit to hold a peaceful demonstration. The UN investigation into the disappearance of another journalist, Chief Ebrima Manneh, is still ongoing.

Unlawful detentions are also a concern. In June, a critic of the President, Imam Ba-Kawsu Fofana, was detained and allegedly tortured. In December, Imam Baba Leigh, who criticised the August executions, has also been detained. His whereabouts are currently unknown.

Under the EU Cotonou Agreement, the provision of development assistance to The Gambia is dependent on the country's human rights record, democratic principles and the rule of law. Progress is reviewed twice a year. But following the executions the relationship between the EU and The Gambia has been strained. In the run-up to the planned review in January 2013 the Gambian government withdrew from the talks.

The Gambia consistently disregards its international human rights obligations, whether in rulings from the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) community court or in UN and Commonwealth protocols which they have signed up to. In 2009, it was censured by the UN Human Rights Committee for such behaviour. There is little evidence that the situation in The Gambia is improving. We will continue to press them to re-engage on human rights issues, bilaterally and through the EU.

Torture prevention

The UK Government consistently and unreservedly condemns torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and it remains a priority for us to combat it wherever and whenever it occurs. We do not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment for any purpose. There is an absolute prohibition on torture in international law, which is both contained in various treaties and is a rule of customary international law binding on all states.

In 2012, we continued to pursue the three goals of the FCO Torture Prevention Strategy 2011–15: to ensure that legal frameworks are in place and enforced, to develop political will and capacity to eradicate torture and to give organisations on the ground skills to ensure its eradication. In November, the FCO hosted an event to mark the first year of the strategy. This was attended by Nick Hardwick CBE, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, Dr Phillip Tahmindjis, Director of the International Bar Association Human Rights Institute, and Philomène Uwamaliya of the "Survivors Speak Out" network. A podcast to accompany the event was released on 10 December.

Throughout the year we used our influence and diplomatic network to raise individual cases in public and in private and issued statements, alone and with others, about specific incidents. In January, then FCO Minister Jeremy Browne wrote an article for *The Guardian* setting out the FCO's commitment and vision for tackling torture. To mark International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on 26 June he made a statement reiterating the Government's commitment to combating torture and to encouraging states to sign and ratify the Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol (OPCAT).

We also continued to pursue the prevention of torture in multilateral organisations. In the UN we successfully secured the re-election of Professor Malcolm Evans to the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, where he has been serving as Chairman. We also pledged financial support to the Subcommittee's Secretariat and contributed to the Special Fund for the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, which delivered its first projects this year. The UK strongly supported the annual UN General Assembly Third Committee resolution on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, which was once again adopted by consensus, and this year included better integration of the preventive agenda in the text.

In the EU we played an active role in the Torture Task Force, and our missions around the world implemented the guidelines on EU policy towards third countries on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Globally, we continued to work with local and international NGOs, prosecutors, prison services and other partners to prevent torture. Activities included:

- Encouraging governments to sign and ratify the Convention against Torture and OPCAT. In 2012, we welcomed the ratification of the convention by the Dominican Republic, Laos and the United Arab Emirates, as well as ratification of OPCAT in Hungary, Mauritania and the Philippines and signature by Chad. Projects included activities delivered by the Geneva-based Association for the Prevention of Torture in Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Honduras, Indonesia, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, the

Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Tajikistan, Tunisia and Uganda. We judge that in the countries where we are funding projects positive progress is being made to put in place the frameworks needed to meet OPCAT's requirements.

- Schemes to strengthen bodies that monitor places of detention to ensure that the National Preventive Mechanisms mandated by OPCAT are put in place, that individuals held in police cells can be visited and that prisoners are able to make complaints about their treatment without reprisals.
- Training for medical staff on the signs of torture and how to document it to a standard which increases the chances of someone being held to account. This training has taken place in Syria and in the Philippines. In Syria this is helping to produce evidence which will assist in holding the perpetrators to account and in the Philippines it is leading to better evidence being available for torture prosecutions.

The Advisory Sub-group on Torture Prevention, made up of torture prevention experts from academia, the legal profession and NGOs, is now well established and held two meetings in 2012. It provides the FCO with expert advice to help us implement the FCO Strategy for the Prevention of Torture. It has also provided advice on OPCAT, including on changes to the size of the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and its working methods, and developments in the EU's human rights architecture that might be used to strengthen torture prevention work.

FCO staff and all British government staff working in our offices abroad are required to report allegations and information they come across about torture and mistreatment. The majority of allegations that our staff see are of torture and mistreatment by police in the very early stages of detention or during pre-trial detention. This information has been used to prioritise where we focus our torture prevention work in 2013.

Case study: Bahrain – progress on reform implementation

The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) exposed a number of flaws across the Bahraini government and rule of law systems. Our main goal for 2012 was to encourage the implementation of reforms based on BICI recommendations, something the Bahrain government has undertaken to do in full. We did this through close engagement at the highest level from the Prime Minister down and hosted a number of Bahraini Ministers to the UK in 2012 in order to identify areas where the UK might be able to offer support.

The commission observed that the use of torture by the security forces was a deep-rooted problem, and that there was a lack of accountability for such acts, despite Bahrain being a party to the Convention against Torture. The Bahraini government took several steps to address this in 2012, including installing audio-visual equipment in detention centres and making amendments to the Penal Code to make the use of torture by officials a punishable offence. A Special Investigations Unit (SIU) was also established to look into allegations of unlawful or negligent acts by rule of law officials, resulting in the deaths, torture or mistreatment of civilians. The current number of officials being investigated is low, and actual convictions even lower; a lack of reliable evidence is a major obstacle and, as a result, the work of the SIU has so far had mixed results.

With funding from the FCO–DFID Arab Partnership, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons will be working with the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior to share best practice on National Preventive Mechanisms against torture in detention centres and to give advice on implementing the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). Our success in lobbying the Bahraini government on OPCAT was shown when they agreed at the Universal Periodic Review to ratify it. In addition, the National Policing Improvement Agency visited Bahrain in late 2012 in response to the Bahraini government's request for forensics training. Increasing the investigative techniques available to the police and reducing reliance on confessions will contribute towards preventing torture. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture is also due to visit Bahrain in 2013.

There is a risk of deterioration in certain human rights areas in 2013. Due to the lack of progress on a genuine political dialogue, there has been a rise in extremist activity and violence. Despite coming under violent provocation from protesters, the police generally responded with more restraint and more proportionately in 2012. We did, however, have reservations about some of the actions taken by the authorities, such as the temporary ban on protests in October and the revocation of Bahraini citizenship of 31 individuals, leaving several stateless. The parameters of freedom of expression continued to be tested too, with numerous convictions of individuals on the grounds of inciting illegal activity, notably through the use of social media. Civilian re-trials of cases that were first heard in National Safety Courts continued throughout the year, and although some sentences were reduced or overturned, there are several cases that remain contentious and some inconsistencies in the lengths of sentences given. We made representations to the government of Bahrain on all of these issues including the "13 political activists".

Nevertheless, the foundations have been laid for further reforms in the judicial and security sectors. Newly created institutions and amendments to legislation suggest that the overall trajectory on human rights in Bahrain is one of improvement over the long term. This will take time and dedicated commitment from the government of Bahrain. Sustained practical help and support from the international community will ensure that progress remains on track. The UK, as a long-standing friend of the people of Bahrain, will continue to play its part.

International justice system

The Government remains fully committed to the principle that there should be no impunity for the most serious international crimes. The Foreign Secretary reiterated the UK's commitment to international criminal justice in a speech on "International Law and Justice in a Networked World" in The Hague in July, available online at the **FCO website**. The UK remains actively engaged with all six existing international criminal courts and tribunals in this area: as a State Party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as a member of the UN Security Council (which oversees the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda) and as a major donor and member of the management bodies of the voluntary-funded tribunals for Sierra Leone, Cambodia and Lebanon.

International Criminal Court

Since its establishment in 2002 under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the ICC has become a cornerstone of international justice. Currently, 121 states are party to the Rome Statute. In 2012, its profile was further raised by a number of events to mark its 10th anniversary.

The ICC delivered its first verdict in the case of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo on 14 March. Mr Lubanga was found guilty of the war crimes of conscripting and enlisting children under the age of 15 and using them to participate in hostilities in the Ituri region in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 1 September 2002 and 13 August 2003. He was subsequently sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment. An appeal is ongoing. The ICC's second verdict was delivered on 18 December in the case of Mathieu Ngudjolo-Chui, a Congolese national who was acquitted of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The prosecution have said they will appeal.

We will work closely with key partners to ensure that the court continues to receive international support and cooperation and to combat attempts to undermine it. The UK has a long-standing reputation for promoting and supporting the work of the ICC, and played a major role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council in ensuring that it had the international backing it needed to take its work forward. We continue to respond to requests from the ICC Prosecutor's office for practical assistance, in particular in areas such as financial investigations and access to witnesses.

In July, we contributed £500,000 to the ICC's Trust Fund for Victims, which will help victims to rebuild their lives and communities. We will continue to explore opportunities to provide further support for victims and to develop national capacity and action to combat impunity.

Throughout 2012, the UK worked to support and develop management and oversight of the ICC, helping to ensure that it continues to mature as an efficient and effective institution. We played a leading role in the negotiations at the ICC's Assembly of States Parties in November to agree a budget which reflected the court's increased workload but which also requires the court to have a robust and transparent management system. We also led efforts to introduce the first review of ICC criminal procedures, due to start in 2013, with the aim of making its processes quicker and fairer.

Special Court for Sierra Leone

In May, Charles Taylor, the former Liberian president, was sentenced by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) to 50 years' imprisonment for aiding and abetting war crimes. As the first conviction in recent times of a former head of state by an international court, this sent a clear message that if senior figures commit crimes they can, and will, be held accountable by the international community. The SCSL is currently hearing Mr Taylor's appeal, which is scheduled to finish in September 2013.

As the second largest donor, the UK continued to provide strong support to the SCSL in its work to tackle impunity and deliver justice to victims of the conflict in Sierra Leone. We made a contribution of £600,000 to the court in March and announced a further contribution of £1 million in December. Securing enough voluntary contributions from others to cover the court's budget remained difficult, however. In the face of a large funding shortfall for 2013, we supported successful efforts to secure emergency funding of $14 million from the UN in December. This grant is expected to cover the court's remaining costs until it completes its work.

In 2013, the SCSL will begin the transition to the Residual Mechanism, which will carry out its remaining essential functions after it completes the judicial process, including witness protection and administration for the prisoners. We will continue to play an active role on the court's management committee to help ensure that the transition goes smoothly and protects the SCSL's legacy.

Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia

The UK continued in 2012 to support the work of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia to deliver justice to millions of victims of the Khmer Rouge regime and hold to account the surviving most senior and responsible perpetrators.

In April, the trial in case 001 concluded with the Supreme Court Chamber upholding on appeal the guilty verdict on former Khmer Rouge prison guard Kaing Guek Eav, also known as "Duch", for crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. His sentence was increased from 35 years to life imprisonment. Trial proceedings in the first segment of case 002, dealing with crimes against humanity, continued, and are expected to conclude in 2013. On trial are three of the four remaining senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime. The fourth, Ieng Thirith, was released from custody in September having been found medically unfit to stand trial in 2011. In October, the court appointed Mark Harmon from the US as the new International Co-Investigating Judge. The Office of the Co-Investigating Judges started preliminary work for the pre-trial investigations in cases 003 and 004, which will be carried out in 2013.

The court faced severe financial difficulties throughout 2012 as it struggled to attract sufficient donations to cover its budget. The UK provided £750,000 to support the national component of the court in March and £600,000 to fund the international component in November. We also lobbied other countries, including those in the region that have not previously contributed, to offer support. Our own contribution helped to ensure that the court met its 2012 budget commitments and continued its work into 2013. We also worked with other donors in pressing the UN to streamline the court's 2013 budget and to implement efficiencies.

In 2013, we will continue to support the court to help to ensure that it is able to conclude its work. There remains a significant shortfall in its 2013 budget, which will be a priority for the UK and other donors.

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

This was a landmark year for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) as the trials of the last two remaining indictees, Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić, began in May and October respectively. These represent a significant milestone for international justice and regional reconciliation and have again shown that there is no impunity for those accused of war crimes.

The UK continued to play a leading role in promoting and supporting the work of the tribunal and providing regular practical support, including access to records, UK-based witnesses, and the enforcement of ICTY prison sentences.

In 2013, the ICTY will begin the transition of its remaining essential functions, including witness protection, to the Residual Mechanism. The UK will continue to support this transition and work to secure the legacy of the ICTY. Continued cooperation with the ICTY and the domestic prosecution of war crimes will also remain important to any potential EU membership for states in the Western Balkans.

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

The past year marked the beginning of the transition of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) to the Residual Mechanism. A key milestone was reached in July with the opening of the Residual Mechanism's ICTR branch in Arusha. The UK continued to support the ICTR's efforts to capture nine remaining fugitives and to ensure a smooth transition of its work to the Residual Mechanism.

The transition process is due to be completed by the end of 2013. The UK will continue to support the ICTR's work in tackling impunity and delivering justice to the victims of the Rwandan genocide and to secure its legacy.

Special Tribunal for Lebanon

The Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) issued four arrest warrants in 2011 for individuals suspected of involvement in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and the death of 22 others in February 2005. No arrests were made in 2012, and the warrants remain outstanding. The UK fully supports STL's work, which remains vital to increasing stability in Lebanon, promoting respect for the rule of law and ending impunity for

political killings. It is important that the STL, as an independent tribunal, be allowed to carry out its work and remain free from political interference.

In March, the UK announced an additional contribution of £1 million to the STL, bringing our total contributions to £3.3 million over the last three years. We have called consistently on Lebanon to implement its obligations to the tribunal, including the payment of its contribution and the arrest and transfer of indictees. We will continue to do so in 2013.

International humanitarian law

International humanitarian law (IHL), as codified in particular in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols and established through customary international law, regulates the conduct of armed conflicts. The UK strategy is to work closely with other states and the Red Cross Movement to promote compliance with international humanitarian law and the treaties on which it is based and to call on states and armed groups who are parties to conflicts to respect it.

DFID provided £20 million in central funding to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 2012 in addition to the significant support the UK makes to the ICRC through individual country programmes. In November, the Foreign Secretary met Peter Maurer, the new ICRC President, to reaffirm the UK's commitment to cooperation with the ICRC and support for its essential humanitarian work.

In 2013, we will continue to work closely with the ICRC and the Red Cross Movement on their initiative on strengthening mechanisms for compliance with international humanitarian law.

Human rights offenders and entry to the UK

Britain welcomes visitors from around the world. But foreign nationals from outside the European Economic Area may come to the UK only if they satisfy the requirements of the Immigration Rules. Where there is independent, reliable and credible evidence that an individual has committed human rights abuses they will not normally be permitted to enter the UK.

The year 2012 saw London hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games. We put in place arrangements to ensure that the many national delegations accredited to the games, which numbered many thousands of individuals, were checked for anyone who might be responsible for human rights abuses. The vast majority of delegates gave no cause for concern. But a handful of cases arose that merited closer evaluation to establish whether there was independent, reliable and credible evidence of involvement in human rights abuses sufficient for us to conclude that the applicant's presence here would not be conducive to the public good. As a result of this process two individuals were not accredited to the games.

Equality and Non-discrimination

Freedom of religion or belief

The promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief is one of the Government's key human rights priorities. Freedom of thought, conscience and belief underpin many other fundamental freedoms. Often where they are under attack we find that other freedoms are under attack too.

The definition of freedom of religion or belief is broad, and encompasses not only the freedom to hold a belief but also the freedom to share it, change it and to teach others about it and the right to hold a humanistic, atheistic or non-religious world view. Religion or belief can therefore be questioned or abandoned as well as championed and adopted. All are equally valid choices, and it is the duty of governments to create space for all.

The Government fully supports the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, which prohibits "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis".

The FCO has drawn up a strategy to guide its promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief internationally. This strategy has four strands: bilateral, multilateral (work in international organisations), project work and internal FCO initiatives.

As part of the bilateral strand, we regularly make clear to our contacts in governments around the world the importance we place on creating a climate of religious tolerance and eliminating legal provisions and policies that discriminate against religious believers. We continue to urge other governments to create the conditions for pluralist and non-sectarian societies and to put in place policies which prevent discrimination against anyone on the basis of their religion or belief.

Sadly, the latest report from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life suggests that violence against religious communities is on the increase. Some 75% of people now live in countries where governments, social groups or individuals restrict their ability to practise their faith freely. Furthermore, the report found that restrictions are increasing in each of the five major regions of the world and that the share of countries with high or very high restrictions on religious beliefs and practices is also rising.

Many of the countries where we were most concerned about restrictions placed on freedom of religion or belief in the course of 2012 are featured in the Countries of Concern section of this report (see **Section IX**). The present section of the report focuses instead on regional issues, incidents in countries not covered in Section IX, as well as wider UK efforts to combat the rising tide of restrictions on religion or belief.

It is deeply regrettable in particular that religious minorities in the Middle East and North Africa have in a large number of cases suffered as a result of instability linked to the Arab Spring. In recent years, this has led to substantial numbers of Christians leaving the region,

with emigration from Iraq the most notable example. We deplore discrimination against religious minorities and constraints imposed on their freedom to practise their faith. The momentous changes we have seen across the Middle East and North Africa are at their core about the people of the region demanding political freedom and greater economic opportunity. The experience of states across the world has been that more inclusive, accountable governments based on consent and legitimacy are more likely to respect the rights of all, including religious minorities. In engagement with governments across the region we have continued to raise the importance of respecting minority rights, including in the formation of new constitutions.

Egypt has witnessed an upsurge in sectarian violence over the transition period, and we are also aware of reports of abuse against women from religious minorities. Throughout 2012, we have been in close contact with representatives of the Coptic Church and religious minorities and have maintained a regular dialogue with the Egyptian authorities. During his meeting with President Mursi at the United Nations General Assembly on 26 September, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of ensuring that the rights of minorities are protected. We will remain in close contact both with the Egyptian authorities and with leaders of the opposition and will look to the Egyptian government to take the transition forward in an inclusive and democratic manner.

Many Syrians are demanding their right to liberty and dignity and the freedom to choose their leaders. We continue to meet representatives and members of minority communities regularly. We will continue to work with the Syrian people, countries in the region and our international partners to support Syrians' demands for a peaceful and democratic transition to a more open society that respects the rights of all its citizens, whether Allawite, Sunni, Christian or Kurd.

The plight of religious communities has also been a cause for concern in some of the countries of Central Asia. In Kazakhstan, a new law requiring every religious group to re-register within a year has been the subject of criticism because of the onerous process involved and because there is no legal basis for any religious group with fewer than 50 worshippers. The law also requires all imported religious literature to be cleared by the State Agency for Religious Affairs. In response, the British Embassy has tried to strengthen religious freedom by providing training to local officials on the international norms on religious freedoms, which Kazakhstan has undertaken to respect through her signature of various international treaties/conventions.

While Tajikistan remains the only country in the region with an officially registered Islamic political party represented in parliament and the highest number of officially registered mosques, concerns remain about restrictions on their operation and access to them by women and the younger generation, most recently evidenced by the decision to install cameras in some mosques. Restrictions are not limited purely to Islam; other religious groups including the Jehovah's Witnesses also experience difficulties.

Indonesia's constitution provides for "all persons the right to worship according to his or her own religion or belief". In practice, all Indonesians are required to identify themselves with one of six specified faiths: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism or Confucianism. Although Indonesia has a strong tradition of religious diversity and tolerance,

hostility towards (and occasional attacks on) the Ahmadiyya, Christian and Shia communities has intensified recently and the central government and law enforcement response has at times been weak. At the local level, authorities have placed restrictions on religious groups which they consider to be "deviant", and while central government is responsible for religious affairs it has not overruled a number of local regulations or decrees restricting rights guaranteed in the constitution. Our Embassy in Jakarta frequently raises freedom of religion issues with the government of Indonesia, and Embassy officers are in regular contact with members of civil society and members of religious groups facing difficulties, such as those related to the Gereja Kristen Indonesia Yasmin Church in Bogor. In our statement as part of Indonesia's Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council in May, we encouraged the government to tackle violence against minority faiths and promote a climate where such incidents do not occur. We also continue to encourage Indonesia to accept a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The British Embassy in Jakarta is using project funds to support a civil society dialogue with the police on religious freedom run by the NGO "Kontras Indonesia". We are also supporting a project which aims to increase understanding of, and respect for, religious freedom through radio, television, public discussion and social media. We will continue to call for religious tolerance across Indonesia and support the efforts of those working to promote pluralism and interfaith dialogue.

In Turkey, a number of minority faith groups have expressed concern that the lack of legal status for some non-Sunni Muslim groups can restrict their activities and access to financial support. We continue to monitor the case of the world's oldest Syriac Orthodox Christian Monastery, Mor Gabriel, in south-eastern Turkey, which is the subject of a dispute over land ownership with the Turkish government. The case has now been submitted to the European Court of Human Rights. The Greek Patriarchate's educational training centre, the Halki Seminary, remains closed, despite calls from the international community to allow it to reopen. The Turkish ministry for religious affairs, the Diyanet, said in 2012 that there was no legal reason for it to remain closed. Minority faith groups were invited to the Turkish parliament in 2012 to submit their proposals for the new constitution, which has raised hopes that the new document will include expanded rights for these groups. Church services were held more widely for non-Muslim religious groups. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew celebrated the Divine Liturgy of the Dormition of Theotokos in August, for the first time in nine decades. In September, the third religious service since 1915 was held at the Armenian Holy Cross Church on the Akdamar Island in Lake Van.

The British Embassy to the Holy See acts as a centre for inter-religious debate, and engages on issues such as the Holy See's relations with El-Azhar in Egypt, the role of the King Abdullah Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue in Vienna and religious minorities in the Middle East. In February, a UK Government delegation to the Holy See, led by the then Minister without Portfolio Baroness Warsi and including four Cabinet ministers, discussed inter-religious dialogue and freedom of religion or belief with Holy See interlocutors, including Cardinal Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious dialogue. **Baroness Warsi's speech** to the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy touched on these issues in both a British domestic and international context.

In July, the Embassy to the Holy See facilitated a visit by students from the Cambridge Muslim College to talk about relations between Islam and Christianity and the Embassy's role in inter-religious and foreign policy work. The college's main role is to train young British Imams.

In 2013, the Embassy will be sponsoring a conference at the Pontifical Gregorian University on religion and secularism.

We have been active in a number of different forums as part of the multilateral strand of our Freedom of Religion or Belief Strategy. In the EU we have consistently highlighted this freedom as a priority area for concern and supported the decision of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Catherine Ashton, to develop new public guidelines for EU staff on freedom of religion or belief. The European External Action Service has drawn on the FCO's toolkit on promoting freedom of religion or belief overseas, as it seeks to enhance EU work in this area, including establishing clearly defined priorities and tools for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief worldwide. The FCO toolkit, which was produced in 2009, is designed to help staff understand the human rights issues involved in this area, and gives them a range of options to promote them and combat violations. It has been used by FCO staff overseas to raise our concerns with host governments about individual cases, as well as to lobby for changes in discriminatory practices and laws.

At the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in October the UK made a statement during the debate and also organised a dialogue on how the OSCE might best add value to the work of its participating states in promoting freedom of religion or belief. We distilled best practice from this, which we shared with the Director of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). We also nominated two UK experts to serve on the ODIHR Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief and are pushing for the panel to be re-formed as soon as possible. We believe that in order to be effective the panel must have the opportunity to make a considered input into the work of the OSCE.

In the UN we are working with our international partners to prevent a return to the "defamation of religions" language that previously characterised the international debate. UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, adopted by consensus in March 2011, enabled more productive discussion of this issue in 2012. Resolution 16/18 focuses on combating religious intolerance, but also includes some valuable statements about the necessity of protecting the human rights of minorities and promoting pluralism in society.

Together with the Canadian High Commission and Wilton Park, we held a conference on combating intolerance and promoting freedom of religion or belief for all. This followed on from UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 and looked in particular at how to equip policy makers to promote inclusive pluralist societies and ensure full respect for, and protection of, holy sites and existing and new places of worship. The conference brought together experts from North America, the EU, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and South and East Asia from both government and civil society. As well as sharing best practice and developing partnerships and networks, it sought to combat societal and cultural obstacles to inclusion and religious freedom. A full report will follow later this year. In 2013,

we will look to strengthen our work in this area by developing a political track to foster dialogue and understanding and so to generate a higher level of political commitment.

The UK strongly supports the annual resolutions led by the EU on freedom of religion or belief and the mandate established by the HRC resolution for the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

We believe that it is important to increase awareness among FCO staff of the way in which religion can shape foreign policy. For this reason, and as part of the internal strand in our Freedom of Religion or Belief Strategy, we have commissioned a new staff training course for 2013, focused on developing a greater understanding of the major religions and the way that they shape foreign policy decisions. It is also aimed at improving communication with minority faith communities and helping us to promote the right to freedom of religion or belief internationally. We have also organised a number of seminars with external expert speakers and set up a staff focus group to share best practice, insights and expertise.

In 2013, we will continue to speak out to condemn the most flagrant instances of violence and discrimination against individuals or groups because of their religion, regardless of the country or faith concerned. In a situation where a particular group is clearly being victimised, we will generally speak in defence of that group. In some situations, however, there can be a risk that choosing to defend a single group will be interpreted as special pleading and can increase rather than diminish the hostility they encounter. In these circumstances we frame our intervention in the wider context of the importance of the rule of law, stressing that where freedom of religion or belief is constrained or violated, it is society as a whole, regardless of religious persuasion, that suffers.

As well as our bilateral efforts we will also continue to work with international organisations in 2013, including by ensuring that the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief are agreed and circulated, seeking the election of UK experts to ODIHR's reconstituted Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and working to ensure the renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Our key objective in multilateral work will be to solidify the international consensus around the need to do more to combat religious intolerance and promote the right to freedom of religion or belief. We recognise that although it is imperative on governments to create the conditions for all to exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief, we cannot tackle this issue alone. We also need civil society organisations and faith groups to play their part in promoting a culture of tolerance and understanding. We will continue to work actively with civil society to facilitate this.

Women's rights

Despite gains in gender equality around the world over the past century, barriers to full equality remain and discrimination and violence against women continue. Preventing women and girls from benefiting fully from education, health and other services and restricting their full participation in society and political representation denies them their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms and increases their marginalisation in society. Gender equality and women's empowerment is a priority international human rights issue for the FCO. The UK has played a key role in promoting the women, peace and security

agenda (see Section IV). The Secretary of State for International Development has also made it clear that gender equality and the rights of women and girls are a priority for the UK's international development work.

The UK Government's ambition is to end all forms of violence against women and girls. It is essential that governments continue to take a strong lead internationally as well as domestically on this issue. Our signature on 8 June of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence reflected our strong commitment to combating violence against women and promoting women's rights more broadly. We are now working towards ratifying the treaty and incorporating it into UK law.

On 8 March, to coincide with International Women's Day, the UK launched an updated version of our cross-governmental Violence against Women and Girls Action Plan, "Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls. Taking Action – the Next Chapter". The updated plan includes new measures to help keep women safe, including a new commitment to work with governments overseas to encourage legislative and policy reform to address the structural causes of violence against women and girls.

As the Foreign Secretary said in a statement to mark International Women's Day, "Women's rights and human rights will remain at the heart of British foreign policy." The former FCO Minister of State Jeremy Browne also paid tribute in a podcast to the important role that women play internationally, and spoke of the need to ensure women's full participation in politics, society and the economy. The FCO marked the day with activities in London and overseas, where our embassies and high commissions participated in a number of activities. In China, our staff held a series of events to promote women's contribution to economic growth. These included a panel discussion in Beijing attended by prominent Chinese businesswomen, local civil society members and Chinese Paralympians, a training workshop for women on making the transition from management to leadership in Shanghai and a forum on "women in the workplace" in Chongqing. In Hungary, our Ambassador signed an agreement with the Hungarian ESZTER Foundation for the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Violent Sexual Attack to help fund a programme to provide psychological and legal support for women and children who are victims of domestic violence. Our Embassy in Poland invited four female guest bloggers to share their views on the role of women in European society.

The Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening, has put gender equality and the rights of women at the heart of the UK's approach to international development. Under her leadership, DFID has identified opportunities for promoting women's rights, including through the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the UK's Presidency of the G8, and negotiations around a post-2015 development framework.

Lynne Featherstone, Ministerial Champion for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Overseas and former Minister for Equalities, visited Ethiopia and Uganda in April, where she met a range of senior government officials, including the former Prime Minister to Ethiopia, the Ugandan Vice President and the Ugandan Speaker of Parliament. She also met local women's rights advocates and members of the diplomatic community and attended a number of UK-funded programmes to tackle violence against women and girls in both

countries. She also attended the 56th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in February. The commission meets annually to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and develop concrete policies to promote global gender equality and the advancement of women. She met a range of senior UN officials, government officials and ministers to highlight the role of the global community in empowering women, including by boosting rural investment, tackling violence against women and challenging the way in which women are represented in the global media. In a UN first, she chaired a panel event on body image in the media, which explored how education can be used to help women and girls to battle negative body image and gender stereotyping.

We were disappointed that UN member states were unable to adopt Agreed Conclusions on the role and empowerment of rural women at this session of the commission. It is important that the international community works together to promote and protect gender equality and women's empowerment. The UK is working actively with other member states to secure a better outcome at CSW57 in 2013, which will focus on violence against women and girls. Andrew Mitchell and Justine Greening, the former and current DFID Secretary of State respectively, and Lynne Featherstone, in her role as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, have put girls' and women's rights at the heart of DFID's work. They have worked closely with leading NGOs and UN Women in efforts to secure strong agreed conclusions at CSW57, and have used their visits overseas to raise a range of women's rights issues and share UK best practice, including on domestic violence, sexual violence, female genital mutilation and early marriage.

In April, the UN Working Group on the Issue of Discrimination Against Women in Law issued its first report, which set out a strategic framework and identified thematic priorities for 2012–2013: discrimination in political life with a focus on political transition and discrimination in public and social life with a focus on economic crisis. We share the working group's view that women's equal participation in the social, economic and political spheres is crucial to achieving sustainable progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. We offer our continued support to the working group on the protection and promotion of the rights of women and the effective elimination of discrimination against women in law and in practice.

At the UN Human Rights Council in June, the UK participated in panel discussions on remedies and reparations for women who have been subjected to violence, and on women human rights defenders. We are concerned that female human rights defenders face particular risks because of their gender, and we call on all governments to regard all human rights defenders, including women, as legitimate actors working in the interests of their respective countries.

In 2012, we raised women's rights with the governments of Finland, India, Morocco, the Philippines, Poland, Argentina, the Czech Republic, Guatemala, Pakistan, Peru, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland and Zambia through the UN Universal Periodic Review process.

The first ever UN General Assembly resolution on female genital mutilation (FGM) was adopted by consensus in the 3rd Committee on 26 November. It will be a biennial

resolution. The current text should be considered therefore as a foundation to be improved and strengthened in the future.

We were pleased that the EU External Action Service's (EEAS) Human Rights and Democracy Strategic Framework, adopted in June, includes a commitment by EU member states to support initiatives against harmful traditional practices, particularly FGM, and against gender-based violence. The UK will work with the EEAS and other EU member states to take this work forward throughout 2013.

The London 2012 Olympics were the first in the history of the games in which all nations participating had women athletes in their teams. The empowerment of girls and women through the practice of sport, promoting women's equal inclusion throughout society and combating discrimination and violence against women, were important commitments within a Joint Communiqué launched on the occasion of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The communiqué was agreed by the United Kingdom, Brazil, Russia and South Korea and launched by ministers on 28 August.

Our embassies and high commissions worked directly with other countries to support programmes and projects to address the structural causes of discrimination and violence against women and girls to ensure their equality before the law and their participation in political and public affairs in accordance with international standards. Through the FCO's Human Rights and Democracy Programme Fund, we are supporting a number of innovative new projects in the poorest countries and working with international organisations and governments overseas to promote women's rights globally, from facilitating access to support services for victims of gender violence in Rio de Janeiro to empowering and training women leaders to participate and run in the coming elections in 2013 in the Philippines.

There has been encouraging progress on women's rights in Turkey with the adoption in March 2012 of the Law on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women. This law aims to protect family members and those in relationships outside marriage from violence, and is a significant improvement on previous legislation. Turkey also ratified the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence in March. A National Action Plan to combat violence against women (2012–15) was adopted by the Ministry for Family and Social Policies. However, shortcomings still remain, with those who commit violence against women receiving only light sentences. Honour killings continue to be a major concern in Turkey, as do under-age marriages. The European Commission's progress report highlighted the need for increased monitoring of the implementation of laws and more parliamentary engagement with women's organisations.

Case study: Women and girls in India

The rape and subsequent death of a female student in New Delhi in December generated widespread media and public attention in India, and brought women's rights sharply into focus. Since this incident Indian authorities have taken new steps to protect women, including introducing fast-track courts and public safety measures. Fast-track courts for rape have been established in several states, including Delhi, Chattisgarh and Assam. Public safety measures include help-lines, women police/prosecutors and installation of public transport cameras.

A judicial committee was also established by the Indian government to review the capacity of India's institutions to deal with crimes against women and to recommend further wide-ranging reforms.

In recent years, the Indian government has demonstrated its wider commitment to improving the lives of women and girls by initiating and funding large, innovative programmes, including schemes covering maternal health and participation in education, which are enabling millions more women and girls to access services. Legal reform (which also addresses domestic violence), along with increased media scrutiny, is also helping to change the boundaries of accepted attitudes and behaviour. Between 2011 and 2012, India improved its ranking from 113th to 105th in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report. However, inequality, discrimination and domestic violence are still pervasive, particularly in India's poorest states. Indian government data indicates that 34% of Indian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15.

Changing the lives of women and girls is at the heart of DFID's programme in India. Support for national and state governments includes helping all girls to complete basic education, further reducing maternal mortality and tackling violence against women and girls.

DFID India's two large civil society programmes also seek to improve the lives of women and girls in India. The Poorest Areas Civil Society Programme addresses social exclusion, the strongest barrier to inclusive growth. It targets India's poorest and most disadvantaged groups: Dalits, Tribal People, Muslims, disabled people and women. The International NGO Partnerships Agreement Programme harnesses local and international experience to develop new ideas for tackling social exclusion.

The UK Government conducts a range of bilateral activities on women's rights with the Indian government, media and civil society. The FCO has also supported Indian civil society organisations on a number of smaller-scale projects aimed at promoting women's rights and women's empowerment.

Children's rights

The protection and promotion of children's rights, including those of children in armed conflict and children at the risk of abduction, form an integral part of the FCO's wider international human rights agenda. Violence, discrimination, poverty and marginalisation can impact children disproportionately, affect their health, education and overall development and put them at an increased risk of exploitation, abuse and trafficking.

Our international work to advance universal standards on children's rights is done mainly through the UN and other international institutions. We were among the main sponsors of the annual resolution at the Human Rights Council on the Rights of the Child. During the Human Rights Council in March, the EU co-hosted an all-day panel discussion on Children and the Administration of Justice. This provided an opportunity for member states to discuss what happens when children come into contact with the justice system and to reaffirm existing standards and commitments, highlight best practice and identify potential ways forward on this issue. The discussion also covered the impact on children when their parents are incarcerated. The UK also hosted an event chaired by the British Ambassador in the margins of the September session of the Human Rights Council on early and forced marriage.

The UK was pleased that UN member states agreed during the General Assembly in November to extend the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children for a further three years. The UK supports the work of the Special Representative on the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children. The UK also marked the first International day of the Girl Child, held on 11 October, which called on governments to recognise the right of the girl child as a woman of the future, to ban forced marriage and girl child marriage, and promote education amongst girls.

The EU Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM) continued the review of the EU Guidelines on the Rights of the Child (2007) throughout 2012. We expect discussions to continue into 2013, when we hope to see the adoption of a final agreed text. We were pleased that the EEAS Human Rights and Democracy Strategic Framework, adopted in June, included commitments to promote the universal ratification and implementation of the International Labour Organization standards on child labour, to ensure EU input to the World Conference on Child Labour in 2013, to conduct a targeted campaign on the rights of the child with a specific focus on violence against children and to promote the prevention of early and forced marriages. We support the work of the EEAS in the protection and promotion of the rights of children.

We have a range of domestic remedies to address issues raised by children in respect of their rights. The arguments for signing and ratifying the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child will be kept under review in light of emerging information on how it will be applied in practice, including the resources that the UN proposes to make available to support implementation.

Our embassies and high commissions play an important role in our work to protect and promote the rights of children. Our High Commission in Mozambique funded a Child Protection and Counter-trafficking Project to contribute to the protection of children from

sexual abuse and trafficking by raising awareness of these crimes in target communities and by challenging aspects of customary law and practice, such as the giving away of child brides. The project has enabled the community to voice their opposition to these practices, which were formerly a taboo subject, and has increased awareness of the free legal remedies available. The project has trained 140 people in Zambezia Province, including traditional leaders, mentors of initiation rites and teachers and has set up "monitoring and denunciation" clubs which have taken on responsibility for publicly identifying and denouncing these crimes. Since the start of the project in June, there have been 25 denunciations.

In Indonesia, for the third year running, our Embassy worked with the UK Child Exploitation and Online Protection Agency (CEOP) to create sustainable national and regional capacity to prevent and deter the sexual exploitation of children both online and offline.

In Guyana, our High Commission worked with the Linden Care Foundation to support services for orphans and vulnerable children, including those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Our High Commission in The Gambia funded a project to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. The project, carried out by the Child Protection Alliance, aimed to raise awareness of child protection issues among community and religious leaders, the tourism industry, police and government officials in order to create a safe environment for children across The Gambia. Information on children and armed conflict can be found in Section IV.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

The protection and promotion of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people is an integral part of the Government's wider international human rights agenda. We believe that human rights are universal and should apply equally to all people, as enshrined in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that to render consenting same-sex relations illegal is incompatible with international human rights laws, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Unfortunately, this position is not universally shared. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 76 countries still retain laws that discriminate against people on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In at least five countries the death penalty may be applied to those found guilty of offences relating to consensual same-sex relations. Internationally the LGBT community continue to experience violation and abuse of their human rights, including torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, restrictions on their freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and discrimination in employment and access to health services and education. They continue also to be subjected to violence and hate crimes.

Our work to protect the rights of LGBT people through international institutions, including the EU, UN, Council of Europe, Commonwealth and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), is an important part of our international efforts to address this issue. Through these institutions and through our embassies and high commissions, we take action on individual cases where persecution or discrimination has occurred and lobby

for changes in discriminatory legislation and practice. We are in regular contact with civil society organisations working on LGBT issues, both in London and overseas.

Our embassies and high commissions also support the work of civil society organisations in their efforts to change social attitudes and behaviour toward LGBT people.

Former FCO Minister of State Jeremy Browne and former International Development Minister Stephen O'Brien marked International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) in May by a statement calling for "an end to this hateful discrimination" and supporting the LGBT community in their "fight against inequality and injustice".

To mark the day, our Embassy in Russia participated in a round table with the local diplomatic community and LGBT NGOs to discuss local LGBT issues. In Moldova our Ambassador spoke at the opening of Moldova Pride. In Bulgaria our Chargé d'Affaires spoke at the opening of an exhibition of "Images against Homophobia". In Chile and Mexico our embassies flew the rainbow flag. In Gibraltar our Governor issued a statement supporting IDAHO and their global work for LGBT equality and justice. Our Governor in the Turks and Caicos Islands issued a statement announcing a review of Turks and Caicos Islands legislation to ensure that it does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. In Jamaica the embassy supported a public forum on homophobic bullying in schools in partnership with the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals and Gays. Our Ambassador also signed a joint article printed in the *Jamaica Gleaner,* bearing the signatures of 10 Ambassadors and High Commissioners, which spoke of the need for Jamaicans to recognise a common humanity and work for open, inclusive and honest dialogue to end discrimination and oppression. The GREAT campaign was designed to use the platform of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to showcase Britain's capabilities, to promote and enhance our reputation abroad and to maximise the economic potential of the games.

In Germany, the British Embassy's GREAT Technology and Innovation Bus was a central participant in the local Christopher Street Day (Gay Pride) Parade. The organisers dedicated this year's parade to Alan Turing, the English mathematician, wartime code-breaker and pioneer of computer science. The event received media attention, including local TV coverage.

We were concerned about a number of reports of Pride events and diversity marches overseas being cancelled and allegations violence towards participants and organisers. Former FCO Minister for Human Rights Jeremy Browne was clear in his message on 28 May when he condemned all such violence and discrimination and encouraged governments to "act to ensure that all people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens, are free to live their lives in a safe and just environment". In response to the cancellation of the 2012 Belgrade Pride Parade in October, Minister for Europe David Lidington stated, "Every government has a responsibility to protect and promote the rights of all its citizens, not least those marginalised by society. In banning the 2012 Belgrade Pride Parade, the Serbian government has failed to meet that responsibility."

Combating discrimination against LGBT people was one of the UK's priorities for our chairmanship of the Council of Europe. On 27 March, the UK delivered a conference in

Strasbourg on “combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity across Europe”. The conference highlighted the concern that discrimination against LGBT people continues to be widespread in Europe, and significant challenges remain to be addressed. During the conference, the UK announced a voluntary contribution of £100,000 to assist the work of the Council of Europe’s LGBT Issues Unit. In September, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers held a debate on the subject of “Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity”, which identified concrete action to take this issue forward, including a review in 2013 of the implementation of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation 2010(5) on measures to combat discrimination against LGBT people.

In March, the UK participated in an expert panel and interactive session at the Human Rights Council to discuss the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights report on “Discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity”. The report, published in December 2011, called on member states to repeal laws used to criminalise individuals on grounds of homosexuality. In 2012, we raised sexual orientation or gender identity with Poland, South Africa, Zambia, India and Ukraine through the mechanism of the UN’s Universal Periodic Review.

Our work with the EU on this issue has also been important. The EEAS Human Rights and Democracy Strategic Framework, adopted in June, includes a commitment that EU member states and the EEAS will work together to develop a strategy on cooperation with third countries on the human rights of LGBT people, including through the UN and the Council of Europe. The UK is determined to contribute fully to a robust and effective EU strategy that will make a real difference to the lives of LGBT people globally.

At their meeting of 29 September, Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers agreed the Eminent Persons Group recommendations that access to treatment for HIV/AIDS should be without discrimination and that discriminatory laws that impede access to treatment should be addressed.

There were some further positive developments on LGBT rights in 2012. For example, in Chile the President signed the first ever anti-discrimination law, which included discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, and which came into effect in July. In Hungary legislation which extends hate crime to include sexual orientation and gender identity will come into force in July 2013. In Croatia embassy representatives took part alongside Croatian government ministers in the Gay Pride March in Split in June. The event saw less intolerance than that witnessed the year before, and received strong support from the Croatian government.

But there were also concerns. In response to new legislation banning the promoting of homosexuality in some regions in Russia, the UK supported a statement on tolerance and non-discrimination delivered by France at the OSCE Permanent Council on 22 March. In Uganda the former FCO Minister for Africa raised our concerns with the President regarding the proposed private member’s bill which would strengthen their anti-homosexuality legislation. The former Home Office Minister for Equalities also raised this issue with a number of senior government figures, including the Vice President. We are working closely with Ugandan civil society groups, and have raised our concerns at the highest levels of the

Ugandan government. FCO Minister for the Middle East and North Africa Alistair Burt spoke out on 1 June to condemn the reported execution of four men on homosexuality charges in Iran. We continue to call for Iran to respect the rights of its LGBT community and abolish its use of the death penalty in all circumstances. In Ukraine, we have worked with the EU to lobby the government against introducing an amendment to their existing legislation which will ban the promotion of homosexuality.

Disability rights

The UK Government is committed to creating opportunities for disabled people to fulfil their potential to be fully participating members of society and to removing barriers which impede this. The UN Convention, now ratified by 127 countries (at the time of writing) creates legal obligations for States Parties and provides a basis on which the UK promotes equality for disabled people in the UK and across the world.

Following the submission in November 2011 of our first periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on how we are implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we successfully supported the election of a UK expert, Diane Mulligan, to the committee in September. She will bring a wealth of skill, commitment and expertise to her role. We participated actively in the 5th Conference of States Parties to the UN Convention in September.

In 2012, we used our role as host nation for the Olympic and Paralympic Games to highlight the power of sport to deliver the vision of the UN Convention. Disabled people were actively involved in the planning, design and delivery of both the Olympic and Paralympic Games. For the first time, the Olympics and Paralympics were conceived, planned and delivered as one, with both given equal priority and attention. The UK is proud to have welcomed the highest ever number of participating Paralympic teams at a games, including from countries who competed for the first time, such as the DPRK and Albania. Disability rights were a core element of the Joint Communiqué on Human Rights, launched in August with future hosts of the games (Russia, Brazil and Republic of Korea).

Leading up to the games, and working with individuals, NGOs, charities and schools, we sought to raise the profile of disability rights internationally and position sport as something that can foster inclusion and promote equality. In Jerusalem, we arranged for the Palestinian Paralympic team based in Gaza to visit the Haram al-Sharif or Temple Mount, one of the most important religious sites in the Old City of Jerusalem. The visit was described by their coach as “a big moment … the British Consulate has made our dream come true”. In the countdown to the Paralympic Games, our messages on disability rights reached a global audience of over 300 million.

We are working with the International Olympic Committee, the International Paralympic Committee and the organisers of future Paralympic Games to support the continued promotion of the Paralympic spirit and values.

We believe that the success of the Paralympics will have helped to change perceptions about disability in the UK and hope that they will have had a similar effect internationally, helping others to realise the ambitions of the UN Convention. To underpin this, we have

been supporting the work of International Inspiration, London 2012's international sports legacy programme, delivered by a unique partnership of organisations including the British Council, UNICEF and UK Sport Foundation. International Inspiration works in partnership with the British Paralympic Association (BPA) and is supported by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). It seeks to enrich the lives of 12 million children in 20 countries through high-quality and inclusive physical education, sport and play.

Last August, thanks to International Inspiration, three young people from Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago and the UK took part in the London 2012 Paralympic Torch Relay as a testament to the participation of children with disabilities in physical education and sport. One of the torchbearers was Anthony, aged 14, born with right primary focal femoral dysplasia, which resulted in his right leg being much shorter than his left. With support from International Inspiration, Anthony helped to organise a Paralympic School Day during which young people with and without disabilities played a variety of sports, including sitting volleyball and blind football.

In Croatia we funded a visit by the Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Nova Gradiška to Zagreb to meet members of the Croatian government and the British Embassy for discussions on how to approach the needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens. The NGO gained high-level access to the Croatian government, meeting both the former Croatian Prime Minister, Jadranka Kosor, and the President of Croatia.

Egypt began its participation in International Inspiration in 2012, and the Egyptian Paralympic Committee visited the UK in January 2013. The committee's aim is to strengthen the inclusion of disabled young Egyptian people in sport and to produce a set of resources for teachers, community coaches and local organisers for the inclusion of disabled young people.

Indigenous rights

The UK Government is committed to promoting and protecting human rights for all individuals, including indigenous people, who continue to be amongst the poorest and most marginalised in the world. We condemn violence and discrimination against people from indigenous and minority groups. Our embassies and high commissions monitor human rights in their host countries and routinely raise our concerns with their governments.

The UK is active bilaterally and internationally, through the EU, the UN and with our Commonwealth partners, to draw attention to the rights of indigenous people, underline the importance of protecting their culture and traditions and to highlight the extreme disadvantages that indigenous people face across a range of social and economic indicators. We continue to emphasise the importance to indigenous people of sustainable development and the preservation of the natural environment, given that their quality and way of life strongly depend on natural resources.

The FCO funds projects in Colombia, Guatemala and Bolivia to encourage and support political participation by indigenous people on issues which affect them, such as land restitution or fishing rights. It also offers support through educational programmes on violence against women in indigenous communities. Indigenous issues also featured at the

high-level EU–Brazil Human Rights Dialogue in May, and the EU funded four projects, totalling almost €600,000, to promote indigenous rights across Brazil, including an Oxfam UK project on indigenous rights in São Paulo.

We also used our Chevening Scholarship in 2012 in Australia to fund a programme to help Aboriginal students gain scholarships, supporting three outstanding scholars who had won places at Oxford and Cambridge universities. We believe that the programme has contributed to providing role models to indigenous communities and demonstrating the importance of educational aspiration.

We are launching a new strategy in 2013 on business and human rights (covered in **Section V**). It is based on the UN Guiding Principles ratified in the UN Human Rights Council in 2011 and will promote responsible business behaviour for UK companies operating overseas. It will encourage UK companies to engage with indigenous communities and undertake impact assessments of their operations, as poor business practices can have a significant detrimental impact on these communities.

Racism

The UK Government is committed to combating racism, xenophobia and intolerance, both domestically and internationally.

Among our main concerns during 2012 were reports of an increase in hate speech and hate crime in Europe. The Council of Europe held a conference in Budapest in November on tackling hate crime, which promoted self-regulation and online moderation as tools for tackling hate speech. The UK Government published a national plan called "Challenge it, Report it, Stop it" in March to tackle hate crime. The plan focuses on challenging attitudes and behaviours that foster hatred, encouraging early intervention, building victims' confidence in the justice system to increase reporting and improving the way in which we respond to hate crime.

The Irish Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) made racism and xenophobia one of the priorities of their chairmanship. We were disappointed that it did not ultimately prove possible to agree an OSCE ministerial decision. Nevertheless, the OSCE held a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in April on "Combating Racism, Intolerance and Discrimination in Society through Sport" at which Lord Bates spoke about the Olympic Truce. The Olympic Truce has its origins in ancient Greece, when it allowed athletes, artists and spectators to travel to Olympia to participate in the Olympic Games and to return home in peace. Securing the 2012 Olympic Truce, which was the subject of a UN resolution, involved Lord Bates walking 3,000 miles across Europe from Athens to London in order to promote the key principles of the Olympic Games of fairness, equality and respect.

The UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent visited the UK in October and held a number of meetings, including with officials from the Department for Communities and Local Government, the FCO, other government departments, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and members of civil society in both London and Liverpool. The purpose of the visit was to gather information prior to their 2013 report on the UK. Their

preliminary findings praised the UK for our comprehensive equalities framework, including our legislation and our effective use of data to help us promote equality and social mobility. They did raise concern, however, that the move to take a more holistic approach to equality risked masking inequalities faced particularly by people of African descent.

The UN resolutions proceeding from the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action continue to articulate the way in which the UN addresses racism. This year's resolution referred to the scope and nature of the Decade on People of African Descent, recognising the positive role that freedom of expression can play in combating racism and the need to address holistically advocacy of racial, ethnic and xenophobic hatred. It was not possible to achieve consensus, however, partly due to concerns that the text failed to recognise that primary responsibility for combating racism lies with states. New language in the resolution on religion rather than race also threatened to blur the distinction between criticising what people believe and criticising who they are. Religion and belief are identities of choice, whereas race and ethnicity are not. Treating these two elements of a person's identity as inextricably linked suggests wrongly that individuals cannot change their religion or beliefs.

A further resolution put forward at the UN dealt with the inadmissibility of practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. This included several improvements on the 2011 version of the text, but new elements introduced during the negotiation prevented consensus. In particular, the change in the title of the resolution to include the glorification of Nazism had the effect of limiting the scope of the resolution and not fully addressing all contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. As with changes elsewhere in the text, we felt that this selective approach meant that the resolution failed to address adequately our responsibility towards all victims of racism, past and present.

In 2013, we will continue to strive for the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination remains a cornerstone of our efforts. We will also nominate UK experts to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Council of Europe's monitoring body, who specialise in combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance in greater Europe.

Roma

The term "Roma" is used at the Council of Europe to refer to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Dom and Lom peoples. It covers a wide diversity of groups, including people who identify themselves as "Gypsies". The Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg published a survey in February on the Roma communities. This found that Roma and Travellers continued to be denied basic human rights and suffered disproportionately in the fields of education, employment and access to housing and healthcare. It also found that the average lifespan for members of the Roma community is shorter, and infant mortality rates higher, than other groups. Its author hoped that publication of the report would encourage the international community to address these issues.

UK efforts to combat the marginalisation of the Roma communities have both a domestic and an international dimension. We seek to share our experience of integration and at the same time to reduce the push factors that force communities which are discriminated against to come to the UK. In Britain, a National Roma Network was established in 2012 to help local authorities and Roma NGOs to overcome the challenges to Roma integration in the UK. The Department for Communities and Local Government, which is a member of the network, reports to the European Commission on its activities and on the situation of the Roma community in the UK more widely. The University of Salford is due to issue a report in 2013 which will provide the most accurate picture to date on the number and distribution of the Roma in the UK.

Our embassies in Central and Eastern Europe were at the forefront of our international efforts in 2012 to combat discrimination against Roma communities. In the Czech Republic, the British Embassy, working with colleagues from Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Slovenia, as well as with local NGOs, organised a day of events to highlight role models from Roma communities and to consider how best to promote positive images of Roma through the media. The key event was a conference addressed by speakers from eight countries. This was followed by lunch with the Czech government's Human Rights Commissioner, an expert round table and a reception at the Ambassador's residence where guests were entertained by Romani rap band Gipsy.cz. The event was well attended, covered widely in the media and received positive feedback from the government, Roma representatives, NGOs and journalists.

Our Embassy in Prague also sought to tackle discrimination in education by sharing models of UK good practice with Czech practitioners. In cooperation with "Equality", a UK NGO, the Embassy organised a series of seminars in several regions attended by local, regional and national government representatives, including the Czech government Human Rights Commissioner, Czech Education Ministry representatives and the Council of Europe. They also brought British teachers to the Czech Republic to share their experience of teaching Roma children and methods of inclusive education. This followed a study which demonstrated that Czech Roma pupils, unfairly segregated in special schools for children with mild mental disabilities in their home country, had been successfully integrated into mainstream education in the UK. The British Ambassador in Prague also worked to encourage the integration of Roma communities into mainstream society by visiting universities, local government and Roma ghettos and funding support to local NGOs, including those in regions that faced violent anti-Roma protests in 2012.

Other British embassies in the region also carried out local projects aimed at strengthening the rights and living standards of the Roma community. In Serbia, an FCO-funded project delivered through the office of the Ombudsman focused specifically on the status and rights of members of the Roma community. In Romania, our embassy paid for 100 children to go to nursery school in an impoverished Roma community in south-west Romania to try and stem the relatively high levels of school abandonment in Roma communities. The embassy also partnered with a school located in one of Bucharest's most deprived areas to highlight "sport for all" during the Olympics and Paralympics. Activities included co-hosting a mini-Olympics and a street-dancing show for the opening ceremony of the Paralympics.

We have also supported initiatives by international organisations such as the OSCE, which hosted a round table in September on overcoming the barriers to integration of migrant, minority, Roma and Sinti women into their communities and into society as a whole. This was followed up by a day at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting dedicated to the empowerment of Roma women. UK Government representatives and education experts on the Council of Europe Roma Experts' group also visited the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 2012 to look at inclusive education. The Council of Europe's Roma mediator training programme then organised a training course in Manchester in December to help to ensure that Gipsy, Roma and Traveller communities receive support in accessing services such as education and healthcare and in finding employment and accommodation.

In 2013, British Embassies in Central and Eastern Europe will continue our efforts to address social exclusion of Roma communities. Our Romania Country strategy includes work with local authorities and developing twinning partnerships such as the link that is developing between Dolj County in south-west Romania and South Yorkshire to share best practice and expertise on employment, healthcare, education and housing.

Antisemitism

Combating all forms of racism, including antisemitism, remains an important part of the UK Government's human rights policy. We continue to develop policies, strategies and legislation to address these issues, both in the UK and globally. The UK's cross-government working group on antisemitism brings together departments from across government and leaders from major Jewish community organisations, including the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Jewish Leadership Council and the Community Security Trust, to take forward the recommendations of the 2006 All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Semitism. One of the main outstanding areas of concern is hate material on the Internet and antisemitism in the media.

In response to these trends, the UK has taken a lead in focusing international attention on online hate and antisemitism. Our activities have ranged from organising three inter-ministerial seminars in Parliament in recent years to working with Internet service providers such as Facebook and Google on managing hate content online. The FCO and the Ministry of Justice sponsored successive events on antisemitism with others in the margins of the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. The Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism Task Force on Internet Hate has broadened its remit to cover all forms of hate.

We have also supported the efforts of NGOs to combat antisemitism. We worked with the London Jewish Cultural Centre (LJCC) on a series of seminars to bring together journalists from Central and Eastern Europe and the UK to raise awareness of the rise of antisemitism and racism and discuss strategies for countering it.

The June plenary session of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF) discussed recent signs of antisemitism and Holocaust denial in a number of its member countries. The UK led the international response to these concerns by proposing a toolbox of escalating measures to enable the ITF Chairman to respond more effectively to incidents of this nature.

Throughout 2012 we spoke out against antisemitism wherever we encountered it. In March, the Foreign Secretary condemned the murder of three children and a teacher by a gunman at a Jewish school in Toulouse. In June, Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt responded robustly to comments about the Talmud and the Jewish faith made at a UN drugs control event in Tehran by Iran's Vice-President Rahimi, saying that racism and antisemitism were unacceptable in any circumstances and calling on Iran to "correct this scandalous statement and to ensure that its officials respect the proper international norms and standards in the future". In July, the Foreign Secretary spoke out against the terrorist attack on a bus carrying Israeli tourists at Bourgas airport in Bulgaria.

In 2013, we will continue to speak out against instances of antisemitism. We will also roll out new training for FCO staff in more detail in the section dealing with post-Holocaust issues.

Anti-Muslim hatred

The cross-government Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group met for the first time in January 2012. The group brings together leading representatives from the Muslim community, academics and government departments and makes recommendations on what more can be done to reduce anti-Muslim hatred. It has begun work to identify the drivers of anti-Muslim hatred and started outreach to encourage more people to report incidents of anti-Muslim behaviour. The Department for Communities and Local Government, which is the host government department for the working group, has also supported the "Tell MAMA" project. This encourages the Muslim community to report incidents of anti-Muslim hatred, and, through its partner organisations, also offers support to victims. The working group's objectives include focusing on the role of the media and tackling hate crime on the Internet, and, from an international perspective, highlighting the role Muslims played in World War I and exploring ways of commemorating the massacre at Srebrenica.

The FCO and individual members of the working group have also sought to combat anti-Muslim hatred through the work of international organisations. The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) held a round table in Vienna in September on Countering Intolerance Against Muslims through Education for Societies in Transition. ODIHR followed this up in November with a round table in Paris, organised in partnership with UNESCO and the Council of Europe, to promote a set of "Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims: Addressing Islamophobia through Education". Members of the UK's cross-governmental Hate Crimes Programme Independent Advisory Group attended this event.

Post-Holocaust issues

The Government is committed to ensuring that the reality of the Holocaust is never forgotten, that issues still outstanding, such as restitution of property stolen during the Holocaust, are resolved and that the right lessons are drawn for the world's continuing struggle against prejudice and hatred. Sir Andrew Burns, the Foreign Secretary's Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues, heads the UK's post-Holocaust work abroad. He is tasked to ensure that the UK plays a prominent role in international discussions on all Holocaust-related matters, especially those relating to education and the opening of archives, and that we continue to respond to the concerns of Holocaust victims and their families.

The UK was a founding member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF). The December plenary meeting of the ITF agreed to rename the ITF the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and warmly welcomed the Foreign Secretary's agreement that the UK should assume the Chairmanship for the year 2014–15 in succession to Canada. The UK delegation, made up of government representatives, academics and NGOs, continued to play a leading role in the development of the IHRA's multi-year work plans in 2012 and in its initiatives on more effective Holocaust education, the battle against Holocaust denial and trivialisation and researching and commemorating the sites of mass murder throughout Europe.

The IHRA seeks to ensure that its 31 member states improve the ways in which they teach, research and commemorate the Holocaust by asking each to report on how they are fulfilling their commitments under the 2000 Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. The UK was asked to submit a report in 2012, among the first group of countries to be approached. Our report covered instances of Holocaust denial in the UK and other hate crimes and their relation to antisemitism, as well as inspiring examples of Holocaust research and education and the creation of memorials and museums. By giving a full, honest and frank account in our own country, we sought to set a high standard for annual self-criticism in future by other IHRA members.

The International Tracing Service (ITS) holds a vast, and unique, archive from the era of National Socialism, consisting of millions of personal records from wartime concentration camps and post-war displaced persons' camps in the three Allied sectors of Germany, as well as the results of extensive enquiries into individual cases made over the past 65 years. The UK played a central role in the creation of the ITS, which is supervised by an International Commission of 11 member governments. The archive and tracing service have been run on the International Commission's behalf since 1955 by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), but with the increasing focus on public access, research and education, the ICRC decided to withdraw from the role of directing the archive at the end of 2012. Sir Andrew Burns led the recruitment process to secure a new Director. The appointment of Professor Rebecca Boehling from the University of Maryland in the United States marks a new era in the management of the ITS. The FCO and the Wiener Library for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide have also been arranging for the Wiener Library to hold and administer for public access a full digital copy of the ITS archive.

The European Shoah Legacy Institute (ESLI), set up by the Terezin Declaration of 2009, was established by the Czech government to address a number of outstanding Holocaust issues, including the difficult questions surrounding property restitution, including communal and private real estate and looted cultural property. At the Prague Immoveable Property Review Conference in 2012, the UK pressed participating governments to adopt practical and constructive measures of restitution rather than yet further declarations of principle and intent. In 2013, ESLI plans to convene a conference on the social welfare of Holocaust survivors.

In December, the Foreign Secretary marked the 70th anniversary of the UN declaration of 17 December 1942 by Sir Anthony Eden and 11 other wartime allies condemning Nazi extermination of the Jews in the strongest possible terms. The **statement** gave rise to

public and parliamentary discussion in the UK and among the United Nations about what could be done to stop the genocide and had a strong impact on subsequent allied planning for the post-war trials of Nazi leaders.

The Holocaust remains an event sufficiently recent in time that there are survivors who still bear witness to the events which threatened to exterminate the Jewish people, the Roma and Sinti and many other vulnerable groups. It has left an indelible scar across Europe and is a perpetual reminder of the need for all governments to stand up against antisemitism, racism, prejudice, religious hatred, xenophobia and discrimination. In order to enhance understanding of the lessons of history and to enable informed policy formulation, the FCO has begun a training programme on the history of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides in Europe, Asia and Africa. We are also piloting a new training course with the London Jewish Cultural Centre on the nature of prejudice and the individual and collective response to it, and featuring testimonies from both a Russian Jewish Partisan from World War II and a survivor from the Rwandan genocide.

We will also mark the 75th anniversary in 2013 of the Kindertransport, when 10,000 Jewish and other children came to this country from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia to escape Nazi persecution and almost certain death.

SECTION IV: Human Rights in Safeguarding Britain's National Security

The security of the United Kingdom is inextricably linked to events overseas. Human rights violations are often the cause, as well as a symptom, of modern conflict in fragile states. The human rights dimension must therefore be integrated into our work overseas to defend national security. That may mean helping other countries to remove potential drivers of conflict or seeking to resolve, or at least minimise, the impact of conflicts where they already exist. It also means ensuring that the Government continues to meet the highest human rights standards as we conduct national security business at home and overseas. This includes being clear that torture and mistreatment are unacceptable. Guidance on this is set out in the Consolidated Guidance to Intelligence Officers and Service Personnel on the Detention and Interviewing of Detainees Overseas and on the Passing and Receipt of Intelligence Related to Detainees and in the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance Human Rights Guidance.

Working in Partnership to Counter Terrorism Overseas

The Government is clear that our counter-terrorism work overseas must both protect our security and uphold human rights. A key element of this is strengthening the ability of other states to counter terrorism, while protecting human rights, as called for by the United Nations. One of the challenges we face is that the threat from terrorism is often greatest in countries where the rule of law and respect for human rights are weakest.

Our approach to this work was laid out by the Foreign Secretary in a speech on "Countering Terrorism Overseas" on 14 February 2013. In this he set out our aim of seeking justice and human rights partnerships with countries where there are both threats to the United Kingdom's security and weaknesses in the law enforcement, human rights and criminal justice architecture. These partnerships will provide a systematic process for working with the authorities to identify shortcomings in capability and addressing these through the provision of UK assistance and expertise.

The sorts of measures we will take include:

- building up the capacity of overseas security services to improve compliance with the law and human rights and to make them more effective;
- working with local investigators to improve their ability to build cases based on evidence;
- supporting prosecutors and judges to ensure that they have the capacity to process terrorism cases through the court system and that cases are handled effectively, fairly and in accordance with the rule of law; and
- working to improve and, where appropriate, monitoring conditions in detention facilities to ensure that convicted terrorists can be held securely and their treatment meets with international standards.

Crucially, we are creating a systematic framework for this work, with strong safeguards:

- We will only engage in such efforts where there is a serious and potentially long-running threat to the UK or UK interests, such as that flowing from terrorist networks in South Asia, Yemen and parts of North and West Africa.
- All our capacity-building work will be considered in line with our Overseas Security and Justice Assistance Guidance in order to assess and to mitigate human rights risks, and will be specifically designed to improve human rights standards and strengthen the rule of law in the country concerned.
- It will not be carried out in isolation, but will be part of UK and international diplomatic and development efforts in the country concerned.
- The intelligence dimension will be subject to the same robust scrutiny and oversight that exists in other areas of Intelligence-related activity and will always be in accordance with the law.
- Every aspect of this work requires ministerial oversight and approval. If ministers see any credible evidence that our support is being misused, we will take immediate action. Any work that would involve breaking our legal obligations simply would not go ahead.

Counter-terrorism Programme work

Countering terrorism is one of the Government's key priorities at home and abroad. Our Counter-terrorism Programme is the FCO's largest strategic programme. A number of UK government departments allocate resources to it, as do our intelligence agencies.

Deportation with Assurances

Deportation with Assurances (DWA) enables the UK to reduce the threat from terrorism by deporting foreign nationals who are engaged in terrorist-related activities while still meeting our domestic and international human rights obligations. We are satisfied that in specific cases government-to-government assurances ensure that the human rights of individual deportees will be respected on their return.

We consider DWA for a small number of foreign terrorist suspects where prosecution in the UK is not an option or after someone has been convicted and served a sentence for terrorist offences in the UK. The Government will not deport someone if there are substantial grounds for believing they will face a risk of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in their home country, or where the death penalty will be applied.

Our DWA arrangements include public and verifiable assurances which have been, and continue to be, tested by the courts. They are set out in a framework Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the UK and the country concerned, and include specific assurances for each individual returned and the establishment of a monitoring body, usually a local independent NGO or national human rights institution, to ensure compliance with the terms of the MoU in each case.

We currently have DWA arrangements with Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon and Ethiopia and Morocco. To date, the UK has deported 10 individuals under these. Fourteen others are currently challenging deportation.

In 2012, we continued to support capacity-building projects and training for the monitoring body in Ethiopia to improve their human rights awareness and understanding of the specific skills required to monitor returnees.

On 17 January the European Court of Human Rights found that the proposed deportation to Jordan of Abu Qatada would not be in violation of Article 3 (the right not to be subject to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment), noting the strength of our MoU with Jordan and sharing the view of the UK courts that the assurances given by Jordan could be relied upon. However, the court found that deportation would be in violation of Article 6 (the right to a fair trial) because there was a real risk that evidence obtained by torture of Abu Qatada's original co-defendants in an *in absentia* trial would be used against him in a re-trial on his return to Jordan.

On 12 November, despite further assurances from the Jordanian government, the Special Immigration Appeals Commission upheld Abu Qatada's appeal on Article 6 grounds. The Home Secretary was granted permission to appeal and the case was heard at the Court of Appeal on 11 March 2013. We are continuing to work closely with the Jordanian government to find a lasting legal solution to allow Qatada's deportation.

The Detainee Inquiry

The Government stands firmly against torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. We do not condone it, nor do we ask others to do it on our behalf. The Government is committed to ensuring that serious allegations made about the role the UK played in the past in the treatment of detainees held by other countries and in the illegal transfer of detainees from one country to another are examined thoroughly and lessons learned. In July 2010, the Prime Minister established an independent Detainee Inquiry to examine whether, and if so to what extent, the UK Government and its intelligence agencies were involved in the improper treatment or rendition of detainees held by other countries in counter-terrorism operations overseas, or were aware of the improper treatment or rendition of detainees in operations in which the UK was involved. Its particular focus was to be on the immediate aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001 and those cases involving the detention of UK nationals and residents in Guantánamo Bay.

In establishing the inquiry under the chairmanship of Sir Peter Gibson, a former Court of Appeal judge, the Government made clear that it would not be able formally to start its work until all related police investigations into detainee allegations had been concluded. The inquiry embarked on an extensive programme of preparatory work in the meantime. In the event, the police investigations took longer to complete than expected and the launch of a new police investigation in January into allegations made by two former Libyan detainees led the Government to conclude that it was not going to be possible to get the inquiry under way in the foreseeable future. As a result, the Government announced on 18 January that it had decided to bring the work of the inquiry to a conclusion and had asked Sir Peter Gibson to provide a report on the inquiry's preparatory work, highlighting particular themes or issues that might warrant further examination.

The then Justice Secretary made a statement to Parliament on 17 July to say the inquiry had sent its report to the Prime Minister and that the Government was looking carefully at its

contents and remained committed to publishing as much of its findings as possible. Since then, officials have been working with the inquiry panel to agree a report for publication.

The Government fully intends to hold an independent, judge-led inquiry when the police investigations are completed. In the meantime, we are cooperating fully with the police investigations.

Guantánamo Bay

The Government maintains that the indefinite detention without trial of persons in Guantánamo Bay is unacceptable and that the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay should be closed. There were no detainee releases from Guantanamo Bay in 2012. Having previously secured the release and return of 14 former detainees, UK efforts continue to secure the release and return of the last former legal UK resident, Shaker Aamer.

Ministers and senior officials continued to raise Mr Aamer's case with their US counterparts throughout the year. In October, the Foreign Secretary confirmed to Parliament that he and the Defence Secretary had made representations regarding Mr Aamer to the then US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta. The Defence Secretary went on to raise Mr Aamer's case with the former US Defense Secretary in January 2013. While a decision on whether to release Mr Aamer ultimately remains in the hands of the United States government, we will continue to work with US counterparts to consider the implications of the 2013 National Defense Authorisation Act for Mr Aamer's release and the closure of the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay.

Counter-proliferation of Weapons

The UK Government supports a responsible defence industry that helps other states meet their legitimate defence and security needs. But we recognise that there remains a risk that governments intent on internal repression or territorial expansion, international terrorist organisations and organised crime networks may seek to acquire weapons, either legally or illegally. We therefore remain committed to ensuring that the legitimate arms trade is properly regulated, both in the UK and internationally. We continue to work with UN member states and with civil society towards our shared goal of a robust and effective Arms Trade Treaty and to be strong advocates for the inclusion of human rights and international humanitarian law in the treaty.

Export licensing

A rigorous, responsible and transparent export-licensing process is vital to ensure that arms exports uphold the stability and security of recipient countries and the human rights of their people. While we do export licensable equipment to countries featuring as a countries of concern in this report, commercial relationships do not prevent us from speaking frankly and openly to the governments of these countries about issues of concern, including human rights. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) is the licensing authority for strategic arms exports from the United Kingdom. The FCO acts as a policy adviser, providing BIS with advice and analysis of the foreign policy aspects of each export licence application. DFID, the Ministry of Defence (MOD), HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the Department of energy and Climate Change (DECC) also provide policy advice to BIS.

Some 15,000 export licence applications are processed annually. Each is assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. These are based on an EU Common Position and include a requirement which is specifically intended to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in countries of final destination. This stipulates that the Government will not issue an export licence if there is a clear risk that the proposed export might be used for internal repression. This is a mandatory criterion which means that if it is judged that such a clear risk exists, the Government must refuse the licence and may not take into account any other factors.

When making export-licensing decisions, the Government examines the political and security conditions in the destination country, the nature of the equipment to be exported, the organisation or unit which will ultimately use it and all available information about how similar equipment has been used in the past and how it is likely to be used in the future. We consult FCO experts in the UK and in our missions overseas and take into account reports from NGOs and the media. Sensitive or finely balanced cases are submitted to ministers for decision.

Once approved, export licences are kept under review. The Government has access to a wide range of daily reporting, including from its global network of embassies and high commissions. This enables us to respond swiftly to changes in risk. In the light of the events of the 2011 Arab Spring, over 150 extant licences were revoked because we judged there to be a heightened risk that the exports concerned might be used in ways which would be contrary to the Consolidated Criteria.

In 2011, (the last complete year for which statistics are available), 82 export licences were refused under Criterion 2. Case studies based on actual export licence applications are published in the Government's Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls (the 2012 edition is due in July 2013). These demonstrate how human rights considerations, among other criteria, are factored into assessments, and provide an insight into how the Government assesses licence applications on a case-by-case basis.

The recommendations of the 2011 FCO Review of Arms Export Policy have now been fully implemented. These include:

- a mechanism enabling the Government to suspend export licensing to a particular country in response to a sudden deterioration in its security or stability which makes conducting a proper risk assessment of export licence applications impracticable for a sustained period;
- updating country risk categories used in the export-licensing assessment process quarterly, based on objective internal and external indicators, including those provided through the Building Stability Overseas Strategy; and
- consulting FCO ministers more on export licence applications, particularly those for equipment that might be used for internal repression. Ministers saw some 300 submissions about export licences in 2012, compared to 153 in 2011 and 39 in 2010.

These improvements have helped to ensure that the UK continues to operate one of the most robust as well as one of the most transparent export-licensing systems in the world.

Cluster munitions

Mines, cluster munitions and other unexploded remnants of war threaten the lives of civilians and hamper post-conflict reconstruction and development.

The 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) prohibits the use, development, production, acquisition, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions. The UK became the 32nd State Party to the CCM in 2010. By the end of 2012, 111 states had signed the convention, of whom 77 are States Parties (up from 67 at the end of 2011). The UK will continue to work alongside fellow States Parties and NGOs to encourage more states to sign and ratify the CCM.

The UK withdrew all cluster munitions from operational service in 2008. By the end of 2012, over three quarters of these munitions, containing over 30 million sub-munitions, had been destroyed. We intend to destroy the remainder by the end of 2013, five years ahead of the CCM deadline.

The UK remains fully committed to the convention. Recent credible reports claiming to show the Syrian regime's use of cluster munitions against its own people provides a stark reminder of the impact that these weapons can have on civilians. Between 2010 and 2013 we will have committed more than £30 million on work to clear mines, cluster munitions and other unexploded remnants of war in a DFID Mine Action Programme which will benefit 450,000 people, clear at least 1,400 hectares of land and open up the potential for new livelihoods for mine-affected communities in eight countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Mine Ban (Ottawa) Treaty

We are similarly committed to mitigating the effects of landmines, and signed and ratified the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (also known as the **Ottawa Treaty**).

In addition to the Mine Action Programme referred to above, DFID is providing £11.2 million over five years from 2009 to 2013 to clear mines in Herat province in Afghanistan to prevent casualties among the civilian population and to promote resettlement, reconstruction and stability by returning mine- and ordinance-contaminated land to productive use.

Following the Arab Spring, DFID's Libya team also worked with the Mines Advisory Group, a not-for-profit organisation, and UN's Mine Action Service (UNMAS) to mitigate the effects of mine-laying. This project has now ended, but the UK is continuing to support UNMAS in its work on coordination and capacity-building with national authorities.

Arms Trade Treaty

The UK has led international efforts to secure agreement on an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) since 2006. Significant progress was made during 2012 on agreement on a treaty which will include:

- the first ever set of global commitments on national arms export controls;
- a mandatory requirement for arms exports to be assessed on the basis of criteria including human rights, with mandatory refusal if they pose unacceptable risks;
- mainstreaming sustainable development and anti-corruption into arms export controls;
- a requirement for states to regulate arms brokering; and
- mandatory reporting on authorisations as well as actual transfers of conventional arms.

At the UN General Assembly in November, UN member states voted overwhelmingly to convene a Negotiating Conference in March 2013 to conclude negotiations. Marking the occasion, the minister responsible for the ATT, Alistair Burt, said:

"*Yesterday in New York, 157 countries pledged their support for a global Arms Trade Treaty. An overwhelming majority of states, including the US, China and India, voted for a return to UN negotiations in 2013 to finalise work on a treaty that will save lives, reduce human suffering and bring consistency to the global trade in conventional arms*."

Working closely with civil society, the defence industry and our international partners, we will continue our efforts to secure agreement in 2013.

Reducing Conflict and Building Stability Overseas

The Conflict Pool

The Conflict Pool is a joint fund managed by the FCO, DFID and the MOD. It funds regional programmes in Afghanistan, Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia and wider Europe. It also supports reform and capacity-building in international organisations, and other cross-cutting thematic work including preventing sexual violence in conflict and protecting civilians. The Conflict Pool's budget for 2012–13 is £209 million.

Conflict Pool programmes support the UK's conflict prevention priorities set out in the Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS). These are to support the building of free, transparent and inclusive political systems; to build effective and accountable security and justice sectors; and to increase the capacity of local populations and regional and multilateral institutions to prevent and resolve conflict. Projects supporting human rights fall within each of these priority areas. They include:

- in Afghanistan, projects in Helmand province which will improve access to justice and increase public confidence by strengthening the links between both the traditional and the formal systems of justice and civil society. The programme is funding the development of prisons in Helmand, working with the Afghan government to ensure that the provincial prison, including the facilities for women and juveniles, meets the UN Standard Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoners. At the national level, the programme continues to support the work of the Human Rights Commission on human rights education and advocacy and their monitoring and investigation of allegations of human rights abuses;

- in Africa, projects to build the capacity of civil society and in doing so to increase government accountability. In Kenya, for example, a Conflict Pool-funded project supports the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders. The coalition monitors the government's commitment to the rule of law, especially with regard to the implementation of the new Kenyan constitution, and will also be involved in monitoring the conduct of the national elections in 2013. In Zimbabwe, Conflict Pool project partners are working to promote peaceful and fair elections by training activists to record and log incidents of political violence and hate speech. Another Conflict Pool project in Zimbabwe offers legal support to the victims of human rights abuses and political violence;
- in the Balkans, where the UK remains the biggest bilateral donor in Kosovo, support for the return of internally displaced persons and communities to their place of origin. In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) the Conflict Pool is funding a project to develop guidelines and a training module on witness protection measures, in line with the European Convention on Human Rights. The guidelines are in use in prosecutors' offices, and the training module has been incorporated into the annual training programme for judges and prosecutors;
- in Central Asia, an initiative to provide human rights training to police in southern Kyrgyzstan. This project aims to improve the links between the police force and local communities, and in doing so to overcome some of the tensions that contributed to ethnic violence in 2010;
- in the North Caucasus, funding for local partners to identify and win individual human rights cases in both domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights, including, in Ingushetia, the first conviction for torture of serving police officers. This was successful not only in providing legal remedy to victims but also in increasing pressure on the authorities to address the impunity of perpetrators and the non-compliance of domestic justice systems with international standards;
- in Sri Lanka, community policing projects in all nine Sri Lankan regions to foster constructive relationships between the police and the communities they serve and to build the capacity of over 200 language societies working with minority groups on language rights awareness-raising, advocacy and litigation. In Nepal, a project supported knowledge and capacity-building in the media to encourage independent, responsible, conflict-sensitive journalism. We also supported local partners promoting independent investigations, criminal prosecutions and improved witness and victim protection to help achieve justice for the victims of human rights abuses committed during the 1996–2006 conflict; and
- in the Middle East and North Africa, the Conflict Pool supports work in Syria, training accountability investigators whose work on gathering evidence has been commended by the UN Commission of Inquiry. We have funded communications, computer and camera equipment to allow Syrian NGOs to report human rights violations and abuses quickly and more effectively. The intention of this and other work in Syria is to compile a body of evidence which can be used subsequently in a court of law to bring those who commit violations and abuses to justice.

Case study: Nigeria – the response to terrorism

Nigeria faces a serious terrorist threat. The Islamist terrorist groups popularly known as Boko Haram have maimed and killed many hundreds in a campaign of violence designed to exploit existing religious and communal fault lines. They have targeted all sections of Nigerian society – Muslims, Christians, rich, poor, civilians and members of the security forces alike – as well as members of the international community. The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court recently reported that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Boko Haram has committed acts which constitute crimes against humanity.

The Nigerian government's response has also raised concerns about respect for human rights. Recent reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch highlighted allegations of extrajudicial killing, unlawful detention and torture by Nigerian security forces. A lack of training, poor command and control and limited faith in the judicial system to deal effectively with terrorist suspects have resulted in the agents of the state often failing to uphold human rights. Few of those responsible for these violations have faced justice, and the Nigerian government has not launched a credible and independent investigation into the allegations, fuelling concerns about lack of accountability.

The Nigerian government has both a right and responsibility to defend its people from terrorism. But while doing so it must ensure that it respects human rights and freedoms. The British Government continues to work with the Nigerian government, civil society and our international partners to encourage this. The Prime Minister raised human rights concerns directly with President Jonathan when they met in February. The British Government provides direct assistance to mainstream international standards in the protection of human rights within the Nigerian police and judiciary through DFID's "Justice for All" programme. The FCO supports a judicial reform programme in northern Nigeria, and is developing a programme of projects to improve human rights training for the police and army in the coming year.

We also continue to promote respect for human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories through work with local Israeli and Palestinian implementing partners. This year, the Conflict Pool has contributed to legal actions which have led to dismantlement of illegal outposts on privately owned Palestinian land, along with the return of hundreds of acres of Palestinian agricultural land in Areas B and C. We have funded groups who monitor and provide access to justice for victims of settler violence and lobby for more robust law enforcement. We have supported work to encourage freedom of movement between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and litigation to promote the right to education, livelihood and the freedom of movement, on behalf of Gazans who wish to seek educational and economic opportunities or family reunification outside the Gaza Strip.

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

At the United Nations World Summit in 2005, member states recognised that the government of each country has a "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) their own population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. They agreed that

the international community should encourage and help states to fulfil this responsibility and would be prepared to take action, which would need to be authorised by the UN Security Council (UNSC), if any state failed to do so.

In 2012, we continued to fund UN efforts and to work with UN member state partners to help countries meet their responsibility to protect their people. We worked with a wide range of countries that also support R2P to encourage them to share their own experiences of action to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. On 5 September, we participated in the annual UN General Assembly interactive dialogue on R2P and joined the majority of UN members in reaffirming our support for implementation. We welcomed the appointment of Mr Adama Dieng as the Secretary-General's new Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide. We look forward to the appointment of the Secretary-General's new Special Adviser for Responsibility to Protect. These roles are critical to supporting successful preventive action.

The United Nation General Assembly (UNGA) debate saw the largest number of countries to date speak out in favour of R2P. Libya and Côte d'Ivoire said that more lives would have been lost in their countries had the international community not responded in a timely and decisive manner to halt mass atrocities. The debate also highlighted continuing divisions over the UNSC-mandated intervention in Libya, and that reaching consensus in the UN on how to apply R2P in practice where atrocities may be imminent will remain a challenge.

We are helping to put in place structures which will allow R2P prevention work to be more effective, including by contributing funding to the Joint Office of the UN Secretary-General's Special Advisers for Genocide and Responsibility to Protect. This will support training and post-training technical assistance to states and regional and sub-regional organisations to strengthen their capacity to develop early-warning, risk assessment and response strategies to prevent genocide and other war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It will also help more states to develop national action plans to identify R2P risks and take practical steps to mitigate them. We continued to provide funding for the international advocacy and outreach work of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, a leading New York-based NGO. This will support increased engagement with states and regional organisations on the implementation of R2P to help build a shared understanding around risks and effective prevention measures. We also support the Global Centre's continued publication of the *R2P Monitor*, a bi-monthly publication that provides policy-makers and civil society with information on populations at a risk of mass atrocities and encourages international efforts to take preventative measures. We also worked to reinvigorate the "Friends of R2P Group", an informal cross-regional group of UN member states that share a common interest in R2P. We have continued to participate in the national Focal Points network and have encouraged more governments to appoint national R2P Focal Points (senior-level officials in individual countries responsible for the promotion of R2P).

We worked closely with the Australians, long-standing supporters of R2P, ahead of their event on R2P at the Human Rights Council (HRC) in June on the HRC's role in the preventive aspects of R2P. We welcomed close cooperation with the United States on early-warning analysis and with France and the Netherlands on engaging through the EU.

Following the publication of the Building Stability Overseas Strategy, we have strengthened our cross-government early-warning and early-action systems to identify those potential conflicts where there is a risk of mass atrocities.

There are many examples of consensual prevention activities to tackle R2P risks, at national, regional and international levels. Examples include President Ouattara's creation of a Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Côte d'Ivoire; President Mbeki's diplomacy between Sudan and South Sudan under the auspices of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel and the development of a UN Regional Strategy on the Lord's Resistance Army by the UN Office for Central Africa and the African Union.

We remain deeply concerned by the continuing conflict in Syria and are committed to pursuing a political solution. The UK continues to urge the Syrian government to implement the six-point plan and the Geneva communiqué of the Syria Action Group to bring an end to the violence and take forward a process of sustainable political transition. All states share a common responsibility, in accordance with the principles set out in R2P, to stop the bloodshed. Members of the UN Security Council have a particular responsibility in this regard. We were appalled by the decision by Russia and China in July to veto a draft UN Security Council resolution on Syria under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which prevented the Security Council from using its collective weight to require the Syrian regime to end the violence and from imposing serious diplomatic consequences if it did not. We continue to urge all members of the Security Council to unite around more decisive action to compel all parties to the conflict to stop the fighting and to work towards a political solution.

Peacebuilding

Improving the capacity of the UN to address post-conflict peacebuilding challenges is critical to helping fragile and conflict-affected states achieve sustainable peace, work towards longer-term development, and avoid relapses into conflict. We see effective peacebuilding as integral to safeguarding and promoting the human rights of those living in such states.

The UK pursues its peacebuilding goals through the United Nations. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon is committed to delivering peacebuilding across the UN, ensuring that peacebuilding work is not only focused on the UN Peacebuilding Commission but relevant to all UN actors, both in New York and in the field. In December, the UK helped to secure a UN Security Council Presidential Statement on peacebuilding. This recognised the importance of national ownership and partnerships in peacebuilding processes, stressed the need for more coordinated, coherent and integrated peacebuilding efforts, and called on the UN, national governments and regional organisations to broaden and deepen the pool of civilian expertise available to carry out peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict.

The timely and effective delivery of civilian expertise is crucial to sustainable peacebuilding. The UK continues to fund the work of the UN team tasked to improve international ability to deliver civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict. Much has been achieved since this process began in 2011. A global focal point for the Rule of Law has been established in the UN in order to delineate more clearly roles and responsibilities across the UN system. In September, the UN also launched "CAPMATCH", an innovative online tool for linking

demand for post-conflict support with available expertise from governments, inter-government and non-government organisations.

In 2011, we committed £55 million over four years to the UN Peacebuilding Fund. The purpose of the fund is to strengthen international support for post-conflict states and prevent them from relapsing into violence, filling the gaps where other funding mechanisms cannot help.

Stabilisation capacity

The Building Stability Overseas Strategy (2011) committed the Government to improving its ability to anticipate instability and identify potential triggers of conflict, to take fast, appropriate and effective action to prevent a crisis or stop it escalating or spreading and investing in "upstream" conflict prevention by helping to build strong, legitimate institutions and robust societies, capable of managing tensions and shocks.

The Stabilisation Unit, which is owned jointly by DFID, the FCO and MOD and funded by the tri-Departmental Conflict Pool, plays a pivotal role in delivering UK stabilisation support to fragile or conflict-affected states. The unit is a centre of expertise, supporting the Government's response to countries at potential risk of instability, working with its parent departments to develop a common analysis of emerging risks and opportunities, advising policy-makers on the possible range of responses and deploying conflict and stabilisation expertise where it is needed. Its staff are drawn from its parent and other government departments, the police and the military.

The current number of experts deployed by the Stabilisation Unit as of the end of February 2013 is 193 across 27 countries. Those countries are Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bosnia, Burundi, Djibouti, DRC, Ethiopia, Georgia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Liberia, Libya, Moldova, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda and Yemen.

In March, a government review clarified the unit's leading role in the deployment of civilians to hostile environments and the provision of expertise on post-military stabilisation planning, conflict analysis and lessons learned from previous interventions such as Afghanistan, Libya and Somalia. The review recommended strengthening the leadership of the unit, increasing the strategic direction it received from its three parent departments and a number of structural and efficiency changes. These recommendations are being implemented.

The UK remains committed to helping to strengthen the capacity of other states to deploy civilian expertise and share their knowledge and experience in post-conflict work. This involves sharing lessons learned with Stabilisation Unit counterparts globally and promoting cooperation among fragile and post-conflict states themselves. We will take this forward in 2013.

Protection of civilians

The UK Government's Strategy on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict for 2010 to 2013 sets out the actions we believe are necessary to help protect civilians in armed conflict. It describes how we promote full respect for the rights of the individual, in accordance with

international humanitarian law, human rights law, refugee law and criminal law, in our political, security and humanitarian work. An **annual review**, published in December, summarises progress against the strategy.

At the United Nations, the UK leads in the UN Security Council on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict agenda. We work to ensure that UN peacekeeping mandates make robust reference to the need to protect civilians bound up in conflict. Nine mission mandates currently contain specific language on this, including the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and African Union/UN Assistance Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), where protection of civilians has been given a renewed focus. The UN Security Council Open Debate held on 25 June helped to draw international attention to key protection issues, including the imperative to maintain humanitarian access to the vulnerable and those most in need.

The UK also continues to fund those UN agencies which have a civilian protection mandate, including the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), and has continued to provide funding in a number humanitarian crises in the last two years, including the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, Syria and Libya.

The UK is active across the globe in providing security and justice assistance to international partners. We have considerable experience and expertise to offer other countries in strengthening institutions such as the police and judiciary in Afghanistan, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Kosovo. DFID has committed to new security and justice programmes in 12 fragile and conflict-affected states, and is improving programming and policy through a vibrant community of practice and support on measuring and demonstrating impact at the country level.

Children and armed conflict

Children are often the most vulnerable group in the devastating consequences of conflict, which include unlawful recruitment, gender-based violence, killing and maiming, separation from families and human trafficking. The UK is strongly committed to supporting the rights of children in conflict and to their protection. It is imperative that children feel safe and secure within their communities, and get the education to which they are entitled.

The UK Government takes direct action to protect children in conflict zones, by applying diplomatic pressure and by funding projects to help protect and rehabilitate children. We have spoken out publicly against those governments and groups that abuse children's rights – for example, in September at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Children in Armed Conflict. At the UN General Assembly's annual session in November, we played an active part in the annual forum on the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles, which aim to consolidate global humanitarian knowledge and experience in working to prevent recruitment of children as soldiers, protect them, support their release from armed forces or armed groups and reintegrate them into civilian life. At the forum, we made clear the need to protect children in armed conflict and combat impunity by holding perpetrators to account for crimes against children.

The UK is a member of the United Nations Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which leads the international response on this issue. This includes pressing

those parties to conflict listed in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict to develop action plans to address violations committed against children. These signed commitments bring perpetrators into compliance with international law, release children from armed groups and protect children from violations. The UN engages in child protection dialogue with armed groups for the purpose of developing and implementing these action plans. States in which armed groups have entered such commitments in 2012 include South Sudan, Burma, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Philippines, Yemen and Syria.

In 2012, the UK continued to support the work of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. In September, we worked to secure the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2068 (2012), which stressed the importance of comprehensively protecting children in all situations of armed conflict, and a commitment by the UN Security Council to address the impact of conflict on children.

Through DFID, the UK supports programmes to reduce both direct and indirect impacts of conflict on children, including on their education, employment, health, nutrition, water and sanitation. DFID almost doubled its core funding to UNICEF in 2011–12, to £40 million per year. In Pakistan, UK aid will help to support 4 million more children in school and improve nutrition services, preventing 500,000 children from becoming under-nourished. In Nepal, DFID provided £9 million from 2009 to 2012 to an employment fund providing skills-training to 40,000 young men and women from disadvantaged groups.

Private security companies

Private security companies (PSCs) play a key role for governments, commercial operators and non-governmental organisations by providing essential protective services in complex and hostile environments, enabling them to carry out safely important humanitarian and development work, as well as wider business and economic activity.

The UK has played a leading role in supporting the development of effective regulation of PSC activity in complex environments to help ensure that their work is carried out in a manner consistent with international legal and human rights obligations. In 2008, the UK endorsed the Montreux Document, in which states commit to observe existing international legal obligations relevant to the operations of PSCs in areas of armed conflict. Then, in 2010, we worked closely with industry, civil society and other countries to create an International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers (ICOC). Most recently, in 2012, we established an independently audited system of professional standards for the land-based operations of British PSCs. PSCs seeking certification in the UK to this new standard will have to be audited by independent third-party auditors accredited by the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS). Our trade association partners, the Security in Complex Environments Group (SCEG), will now work with us to develop guidance to help British PSCs meet the requirements of the new standard.

In 2012, the UK continued to work with other states, industry and civil society toward globally recognised standards and an effective international oversight mechanism through the ICOC process. The main elements of a charter to set up this new international body to promote and govern implementation of the ICOC have been agreed in principle between the industry,

civil society and interested governments, and we hope the new mechanism will be operational by 2014. This will ensure that the integrity of standards is maintained and that UK companies are operating on a level international playing field. We will also continue to work on equivalent professional standards in the maritime sector, in recognition of the rapid rise in the use of PSCs in anti-piracy operations.

Clarity on the standards against which PSCs should be audited is an important step forward in the drive to raise standards in this industry. It is also a practical illustration of the UK's commitment to human rights and to working with business and civil society to find effective ways to implement our commitments, even in the most challenging environments.

Women, peace and security

The UK is committed to furthering the UN's agenda on women, peace and security, as set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000. The FCO, DFID, MOD and the Stabilisation Unit worked together to deliver the commitments of the UK National Action Plan on implementing that resolution, cooperating closely with the Ministerial Champion for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Overseas, Lynne Featherstone, as well as with civil society. The work complemented the Foreign Secretary's **Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative**, which was launched in May.

Work has continued in the three countries which are the focus of UK bilateral action in our National Action Plan. In Afghanistan, we have ensured that international conferences in Chicago and Tokyo on Afghanistan recognised the importance of women's participation in the political process. DFID's Tawanmandi project to strengthen Afghan civil society also provided grants to 15 organisations working on projects exclusively for women. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the UK played an important role in the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), extended until 30 June 2013, ensuring that the scope of the mission fully considered the role of women in peace and security issues. DFID is also providing £51 million over five years for the Sector and Police Action Programme, which works to build political will and institutional capacity to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls in the security and justice sector. The British Embassy in Nepal played a leading role in helping Nepal to deliver its own commitments on women, peace and security. Through the Nepal government-led Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF), DFID Nepal is supporting six projects to the value of £2.2 million for the implementation of the National Action Plan on UNSCRs 1325 and 1820. DFID Nepal has also been supporting bilaterally a women's paralegal programme covering all 75 districts and implemented by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare with technical support from UNICEF. The focus of this programme is to create awareness on gender-based violence issues, strengthen community referrals and support the victims of violence. We have continued to develop a Regional Plan on the Middle East and North Africa, taken forward through consultation, diplomatic lobbying, human rights and gender strategies.

In the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the UK worked to promote the full implementation of the women, peace and security agenda in all 56

participating states. We take an active role in supporting the development of an OSCE-wide action plan regarding UNSCR 1325.

At the United Nations, during the UK Presidency of the Security Council in March, the UK Mission to the UN held a Security Council Arria Formula Meeting on Women's Role in Mediation and post-conflict resolution. Also in the UN Security Council, the UK drafted a presidential statement highlighting the role of civil society in conflict resolution and on human rights. This was adopted in October. The UK contributed to the Security Council's Open Debate in November on the role of civil society in the empowerment and protection of women in situations of armed conflict.

At home, to mark International Women's Day in March, the FCO hosted a screening of the film *The Whistleblower*, followed by a question and answer session. In November, a seminar was held on Mainstreaming Women, Peace and Security issues into the UK Government Building Stability Overseas Strategy.

On 31 October, the second Annual Review of the National Action Plan was laid before Parliament by written ministerial statement. In November, Government officials met the Associate Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security, and representatives from civil society, including Gender Action Peace and Security, to discuss the annual review and to consult on taking forward the Women, Peace and Security agenda into 2013.

Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative

Sexual violence in conflict is widespread; it can be used as a tactic of warfare to degrade, humiliate and destroy political opponents, communities or entire ethnic and religious groups. Its prevalence further inflames conflict and is a barrier to sustainable peace and development. Although large numbers of women are affected by this crime, men, girls and boys are also victims. In many parts of the world, impunity for these crimes is the norm rather than the exception. In Bosnia and Herzegovina up to 50,000 women were raped during the war in the 1990s, and only 30 people have been convicted so far for these crimes. Of the thousands of reported rapes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in one recent period, up to 50% of all survivors were under the age of 17 and 10% were under the age of 10.

The Government believes there is more that can – and must – be done to tackle sexual violence in conflict. On 29 May, the Foreign Secretary launched the **Preventing Sexual Violence in conflict Initiative** (PSVI). The objectives of the initiative are to address the culture of impunity by increasing the number of perpetrators brought to justice both internationally and nationally; strengthening international efforts and coordination; and supporting states to build their national capacity to prosecute acts of sexual violence committed during conflict.

The Initiative supports UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, including resolutions 1325, 1889, 1888, 1960 and 1820 and our work complements wider UK Government policy on the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Combating sexual violence in conflict contributes to the advancement of women's empowerment and women's political

participation, which is a focus of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The initiative also supports existing cross-government work on conflict prevention and violence against women and girls such as the cross-government Building Stability Overseas Strategy, which emphasises the need to address violence against women and support women's role in building peace.

Since the launch in May, we have worked with a wide range of countries, NGOs, UN agencies and experts to define how the UK and the international community can step up action on this issue. During the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence Campaign from 25 November until 10 December (a UN-recognised campaign that starts with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and ends with Human Rights Day) the initiative partnered with a number of NGOs to raise awareness of the diverse nature of survivors and geographical spread of sexual violence in conflict using a range of social media tools including Facebook, Twitter, the blogging site Tumblr, and our blogs written by our embassies and posts around the world to reach a wide audience. The FCO held an initial NGO consultation in July to ensure that the initiative focuses on areas where the UK can add distinct expertise and support and avoids duplicating existing work. The consultation was followed by a high-level UN General Assembly event in September to galvanise international attention. Separately, we organised a successful expert-level conference at Wilton Park in November, which further informed the development of the initiative. The Foreign Secretary has also convened a Steering Board of experts to help shape the initiative and to share their extensive expertise on this issue.

We have increased our support to the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict by providing £1 million of core funding. This UN Office is responsible for working with conflict-affected countries on sexual violence. We will also contribute £370,000 over a three-year period to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support. The UK has also donated £1 million over two years to the International Criminal Court's Trust Fund for Victims, which includes victims of sexual violence.

A key strand of work under the initiative in 2012 was the establishment of a UK Team of Experts from a wide range of specialist backgrounds in issues relating to sexual violence. They are able to deploy to conflict areas to help support local efforts to investigate allegations of sexual violence and gather evidence. A first deployment took place in December in partnership with the NGO, Physicians for Human Rights, to the Syrian border region. A scoping mission also took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina to look at areas where the UK might support the local justice system to deal with the post-conflict legacy of sexual violence.

In 2013, we aim to deploy the UK Team of Experts to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bosnia, Libya and South Sudan. There will also be a second deployment to the borders of Syria to build on our initial programme of work with Physicians for Human Rights. The focus of each of these missions will be shaped by a detailed needs assessment, and deployments will be tailored to conditions on the ground. Activities might include capacity-building with local partners; strengthening local efforts to develop protection units with courts; improving investigative capacity; and cooperation for investigations and prosecutions.

Case study: First deployment of a UK team of experts to the Syrian border

As the conflict in Syria escalated during 2012, Human Rights Watch and other organisations increasingly reported a growing number of human rights violations and abuses, including the use of sexual violence against women, men and children. Experience from other conflicts indicates that without immediate attention to documenting and recording evidence of these abhorrent crimes there would be a reduced likelihood of prosecuting the perpetrators in the future. In late 2012, two former police officers from the UK with extensive experience of investigating sexual violence crimes specifically in conflict travelled to the Syrian border to provide training on the collection, handling, documentation and storage of evidence.

The UK experts worked closely with other specialists in sexual violence issues to provide training through an established programme with Physicians for Human Rights (PHR). With additional PSVI support (finances and UK expertise) the training programme was adapted and extended so that it covered the collection of evidence for torture and also included specialist training on evidence collection and support for survivors of sexual violence. The training was provided to 21 Syrian medical professionals, who work both in the border areas and in Syria, in field hospitals, rehabilitation centres and clinics. Every day they treat over 200 patients injured as a result of the Syrian conflict.

We will extend training programmes in 2013 through the deployments of UK experts to cover other Syrian border areas with a view to providing increased capacity to prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence crimes.

The UK assumed the Presidency of the G8 in January 2013. The Foreign Secretary's intention is to use the opportunity of our G8 presidency to ensure greater international attention and commitment to tackling the issue of sexual violence in conflict. He will convene the G8 Foreign Ministers' meeting in April 2013 with the intention of securing a clear political statement from the G8 of its determination to make real, tangible progress on combating the use of sexual violence in conflict. In addition, we will seek a wider set of practical commitments to overcome the barriers that impede the implementation of the existing international legal framework and prevent successful investigations and prosecutions.

We will also seek G8 endorsement of a new, non-legally binding, International Protocol on the investigation and documentation of sexual violence in conflict. This Protocol will help to improve the evidence base from which prosecutions for sexual violence in conflict can be drawn. It will build on the existing local, regional and international guidance and be open to G8 partners, other states, the UN system, regional bodies and NGOs to adopt and use in training and capacity-building programmes.

SECTION V: Human Rights in Promoting Britain's Prosperity

The promotion of the UK's prosperity and the promotion and protection of human rights are mutually supportive priorities at the heart of the UK's foreign policy. Sustainable trade is vital for our economy, supports UK jobs and promotes long-term British and global growth. Trade is most sustainable in markets characterised by good governance, the rule of law, transparency and responsible business conduct, including the protection of, and respect for, human rights.

Respect for human rights makes states better able to trade globally, furthering their economic development. It is also in the interests of companies. As well as the moral imperative, there is a strong business case for adopting human rights and conflict-sensitive best practice. It reduces the risks and associated costs of reputational damage, disruption and litigation, and increases security within the supply chain. In addition, there is a growing demand among investors for more ethically conscious business practice, and among consumers for products and services from companies that behave responsibly.

The UK is prepared to engage with all states on the links between business and human rights, including those whose record on human rights is poor. We will continue to raise our concerns about human rights wherever and whenever they arise, including those countries with which we are seeking closer commercial ties.

Our commitment to promoting responsible business engagement is not new. Global debate about the responsibilities of business in relation to human rights has been gathering pace since the mid-1990s. A number of international initiatives have been adopted during this period, which have created guidelines for businesses. The UK has actively participated or led on several of these, including the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights for extractive industries. As a member of the OECD we have been equally committed to promoting the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises with businesses (see below).

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

The UK welcomed the appointment in 2005 of Professor John Ruggie as the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on business and human rights. We supported Professor Ruggie's work from its initial stages on the "Protect, Respect, Remedy" framework in 2008 to the endorsement of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011. The guiding principles focus on the duty of states to protect individuals against human rights abuses by third parties, including business, the corporate responsibility to respect human rights and the need for access by victims to both judicial and non-judicial remedies against abuse. We continue to support the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, which was established to take this work forward.

It is incumbent on UN member states now to implement the guiding principles. The EU has included support for them in its human rights strategy. Other organisations such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe are also reflecting the principles in their work in this area, and they have been incorporated in standards and guidelines including the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, ISO 26000 on corporate social responsibility and

the updated International Finance Corporation's Performance Standards on Social and Environmental Sustainability.

The UK expects to be one of the first states to publish a national strategy to implement the UN Guiding Principles in early 2013. Informed by the conviction that in order to inspire confidence as international political, trade and investment partners we need to uphold the rule of law and respect for human rights, this will set out the Government's expectations for UK businesses to behave with respect for human rights wherever they operate. The strategy was developed during 2012 under the supervision of a cross-government steering group. It was informed by views gathered through a number of consultative workshops with multinational and small and medium-sized businesses from a variety of sectors including extraction and mining, finance, telecommunications and retail, as well as civil society groups and other leading thinkers in the field of business and human rights. We followed this up in June with an international Wilton Park conference, which brought together expert groups from other governments, inter-government organisations such as the International Labour Organization, businesses, civil society groups and members of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights. Some consistent themes emerged from these consultations, including the need for government to play an active role in communicating expectations to businesses, to examine the impact of existing approaches as well as considering making new laws or supporting new voluntary initiatives and to incorporate human rights due diligence into government contract assessment and procurement procedures.

In 2012, we also sought to expand our dialogue with businesses on their role in respecting human rights, encouraging companies looking to expand overseas to "know before you go". We updated the FCO/UK Trade and Investment Overseas Business Risk website to include a new human rights section with links to guidelines on best practice such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the Voluntary Principles for Security and Human Rights:
http://www.ukti.gov.uk/export/howwehelp/overseasbusinessrisk/humanrights.html

We also updated the 100+ country market reports to cover human rights so that companies can access information on key human rights risks in the countries in which they are operating.

We revised our Business and Human Rights toolkit in 2012 to include our work on the UN Guiding Principles. The toolkit helps our embassies and high commissions to engage on this issue with host governments and business. We also updated government training for trade and commercial officers working in the UK and overseas to place greater emphasis on respect for human rights.

We used £750,000 of our Human Rights and Democracy Programme budget in 2012 to sponsor projects promoting business and human rights in Burma, China, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, India and Uganda. Our embassies and high commissions worked with UK and local civil society groups, British and local companies and host governments to promote responsible business behaviour and best practice. Our Embassy in China and our consulate in Hong Kong hosted business conferences with UK companies to encourage them to consider the full range of human rights issues in their activities. We also continued throughout 2012 to work with other like-minded countries,

including our EU and Commonwealth partners, to push for the wider international community to do more in this field. In 2013, we will continue to encourage international take-up of the UN Guiding Principles.

OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises

The OECD guidelines provide voluntary principles and standards of corporate behaviour for multinational businesses. A new chapter on human rights obligations was added to the guidelines in 2011. Governments adhering to the guidelines must set up National Contact Points to promote the guidelines and implement the associated complaints procedure. The UK National Contact Point (NCP) is provided by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, with support from DFID.

In 2012, the UK NCP received six complaints about the behaviour of UK businesses overseas, including four which alleged breaches of the human rights provisions of the guidelines. The NCP did not consider that the human rights-related complaints were substantiated and does not plan further action on them.

The NCP's work to promote the guidelines in 2012 included a range of meetings and presentations to business and NGOs in the UK and overseas, including events in Chile, India, Malaysia, Norway and Tunisia. In 2013, it will work with other NCPs and the OECD to apply the updated guidelines and improve the consistency of approach across adhering countries, support other countries interested in applying the guidelines or developing corporate responsibility standards (the NCP is co-sponsoring an event with Brazil's NCP in January, and will follow up on its 2012 work with the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs) and continue to raise awareness of the guidelines among UK businesses and NGOs.

Information on the OECD Guidelines and the UK NCP can be found at:
www.gov.uk/uk-national-contact-point-for-the-organisation-for-economic-co-operation-and-development-oecd-guidelines-for-multinational-enterprises

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (the "Voluntary Principles") were established in 2000 by the FCO and US State Department to provide guidance on responsible business practices to oil, gas and mining companies, which often operate in high-risk and conflict-affected areas. This guidance helps companies to engage with public and private security providers and conduct effective risk assessments in order to ensure that their security operations do not lead to human rights abuses or exacerbate conflict. The voluntary principles also enable companies, governments and NGOs to work together to find solutions to complex security and human rights challenges. Those who have adopted the initiative, including 7 governments, 20 multinational oil, gas and mining companies, and 12 NGOs, meet annually to share best practice and monitor adherence to the principles. The Voluntary Principles are an important tool for delivering the upstream conflict prevention objectives of the Government's Building Stability Overseas Strategy.

During 2012, the UK worked with Voluntary Principles partners to set up the Voluntary Principles Association, a non-profit organisation based in the Netherlands, to give the voluntary principles better governance, administrative and financial arrangements.

We also sought to broaden membership of the initiative, particularly among UK companies and governments of countries with significant oil, gas and mineral resources, to ensure greater global impact and increased protection for people living in fragile or conflict-affected states. We welcome the news that Australia has agreed to join in 2013. A number of major UK extractive companies also expressed their intention to join following a meeting in London hosted by the Foreign Office Minister for Africa. Our overseas network worked throughout the year to raise awareness of the voluntary principles, and to promote their adoption, in countries including Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, Angola, Australia, Peru, Indonesia, South Africa, Kazakhstan and Japan.

In 2013, the UK will continue to support efforts to improve the implementation and impact of the voluntary principles, including work to develop performance indicators to assess and measure compliance by extractive companies.

The Kimberley Process

The Kimberley Process (KP) diamond certification scheme was established in 2002 to regulate the global trade in rough diamonds and so prevent rebel groups trading in them to fund armed conflict. The KP scheme now has 54 participants representing 80 countries and accounts for over 99% of the global production and trade of rough diamonds. The UK is represented in the KP by the European Union.

The Government Diamond Office (GDO), based in the FCO, the UK Border Agency and Customs are responsible for preventing illicit diamonds entering or leaving the UK. In 2012, the GDO worked with the UK's rough diamond industry to provide expert advice and oversight of industry compliance with KP minimum standards. GDO officials carried out inspections of diamond shipments on selected UK imports and exports, and also worked with industry and other KP member governments to ensure effective implementation of the KP scheme around the world.

Experts estimate that since the KP was established 10 years ago, so-called "conflict diamonds" have fallen from 15% to less than 1% of the global trade in rough diamonds. But significant challenges remain, including around artisanal mining, and particularly in certain African countries.

In 2012, the UK supported the work of the EU-led "KP Friends of Côte d'Ivoire", which is helping Côte d'Ivoire improve controls over the production and trade in rough diamonds to meet KP minimum requirements.

For most of 2012, the KP implemented special monitoring arrangements to assess and encourage compliance with KP minimum standards in the Marange region of Zimbabwe. Exports from Marange had been restricted by the KP since 2009 following a breakdown in internal controls on trade in rough diamonds, accompanied by serious human rights

violations. Although the KP does not have a mandate to address human rights violations by state actors, local NGOs have reported that the human rights situation in the Marange diamond-mining area had improved significantly since the KP took action in 2009. KP participants decided at the KP plenary meeting in November 2012 not to renew the special monitoring arrangements following reports of significant improvements in security and controls around Marange mining sites. The KP and the UK will continue to monitor the situation.

Throughout the year, the UK worked closely with the EU, industry, civil society and other governments to support efforts to expand the KP's mandate to enable it to address serious human rights violations by states. Unfortunately, resistance from a number of government participants in the KP and the fact that the KP relies on unanimous decision-making meant that progress was limited.

In 2013, we will continue to work with like-minded partners to identify ways to strengthen the KP to ensure that it is a credible and effective force for the prevention of conflict, and to address human rights issues in the diamond supply chain, including through pursuing amendments to the KP's mandate.

Bribery and Corruption

Corruption is a major impediment to sustainable development and has a disproportionate impact on poor communities. It corrodes the fabric of society, undermines the rule of law and democracy, deters private sector investment and creates barriers to doing business.

The UK Bribery Act came into force in July 2011. The Act covers bribery overseas as well as in the UK, and addresses passive as well as active corruption. It acknowledges the international and multi-faceted nature of the challenge. It has been recognised internationally as the standard for others to aspire to. We hope and believe it will become the template for others.

Our embassies, high commissions and consulates have been active in supporting the effective implementation of the Act by providing advice to British business on how they might meet their obligations under it and promoting the guidance on facilitation payments, business expenditure and corporate self-reporting published by the Serious Fraud Office in October.

Our **Overseas Business Risk website** offers country-specific advice to British companies to help them manage political and reputational risks when operating overseas. It provides information on issues such as UK legislation on bribery, the potentially adverse impact that business activity can have on human rights, and how to avoid this as a part of an approach to political and reputational risk management.

The UK works to improve standards of anti-corruption legislation and enforcement in our trading partners through the OECD, the UN and the Council of Europe conventions against corruption. We also seek to meet these standards ourselves. In March, the OECD commended the UK for the increase in enforcement action we had taken on foreign bribery

and the substantial efforts we had made to raise awareness of the Bribery Act and its provisions on bribery overseas.

Arms Export Licensing

Britain has one of the most robust arms export-licensing systems in the world. This promotes the UK's prosperity by supporting responsible exports which meet the legitimate defence and security needs of other states while preventing exports which might fuel regional or internal conflicts, threaten UK national security or breach human rights (see **Section IV** for more details).

EU Trade and Human Rights

Since 1995, the EU has incorporated a human rights clause in all agreements with third countries except sector-specific agreements such as steel and fisheries. This gives the EU a mechanism to raise human rights issues bilaterally and if necessary to suspend agreements if human rights violations are committed by the country concerned.

The EU signed a free trade agreement with Peru and Colombia in June, which received consent from the European Parliament in December. The inclusion of a human rights clause and suspension clause was seen as a particularly important part of this agreement.

SECTION VI: Human Rights for British Nationals Overseas

Promoting and protecting the human rights of British nationals overseas, with a special focus on helping the most vulnerable, is an integral part of the work of our global network of consular staff. We provide advice and support to British nationals facing the death penalty and those in detention who allege mistreatment or who have concerns about the fairness of their trial, and we will press governments, police and prison authorities to meet international human rights standards on their behalf. We assist British nationals who have been forced into a marriage against their will, suffered assault or crime, or whose children have been abducted by a former partner. In all cases we work closely with human rights NGOs, both in the UK and abroad, to complement the support the FCO can provide.

The Death Penalty

The UK opposes the use of the death penalty in all circumstances and will use all appropriate influence to prevent the execution of any British national. We intervene at whatever stage and level is judged appropriate from the moment a death sentence becomes a possibility. We will lobby at a senior political level when necessary, and did so in 2012 in a number of countries.

Our past interventions have included submitting *amicus curiae* briefs to foreign courts (a process whereby an interested group not party to a case volunteers information to a court on a matter before it) and making joint senior-level representations with other European countries to foreign governments. In August, we submitted an *amicus* brief to the Supreme Court of Indonesia, the first brief from the UK Government to be prepared in a foreign language on behalf of a British national facing the death penalty.

At the end of 2012, there were 12 British nationals under sentence of death in countries across the world and over 50 British prisoners facing trial for offences that could attract the death penalty. The most common charges were drugs-trafficking and murder. During the year, we made representations on behalf of British nationals in a number of countries, including in the Central African Republic, China, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and the US.

We work alongside detainees' local lawyers and in partnership with the NGO Reprieve and a network of lawyers in the UK to seek to prevent British nationals receiving a death sentence. Where death sentences have been imposed, we seek their review or commutation. In 2012, we worked closely with Reprieve on a case involving three British nationals who had been sentenced to death in Thailand. Following intervention by Reprieve and consular officials in Thailand, the UK and Hong Kong, the men were granted an amnesty by the King of Thailand and their sentences converted to life imprisonment.

We believe that our active involvement often helps either to prevent British nationals being sentenced to death or to delay execution, providing further opportunity for us to make additional representations. We will continue to intervene in these cases.

Overseas Prisoners

At the end of September 2012, we were aware of over 2,600 British prisoners detained overseas in 95 countries. We offer consular assistance to all British nationals, whether they are in police custody, awaiting trial or serving a prison sentence, and regardless of the crime they have been charged with.

We aim to contact British detainees within 24 hours of being notified of their arrest or detention, and, with their consent, visit them as soon as possible afterwards. Our primary role is to monitor their welfare and to provide basic information about the local legal and penal system, including a list of English-speaking lawyers and interpreters, and the availability of legal aid.

We also work closely with Prisoners Abroad, Reprieve, Fair Trials International and other NGOs in this field to help those detained overseas to make contact with family members and obtain any specialist help and advice they need. Prisoners Abroad care for the welfare of British citizens in detention overseas and offer essential services to help them through their time in custody. We work with them on over a thousand cases a year, in particular where prisoners have medical issues. In 2012, we collaborated on the case of a British national in Europe who was not provided with life-sustaining medication. His medical condition was considered by the court and he has now been returned to the UK. We are also collaborating with Fair Trials International to ensure that British nationals are provided with important information on their rights when they are first detained.

Many British prisoners make allegations about poor prison conditions and abusive treatment. We received over 100 new reports of mistreatment from British nationals abroad in 2012, many in European countries. These involved customs officials, police officers, prison guards and military personnel, and varied from verbal threats by other prisoners to being threatened with a gun to sign documents in a foreign language and being subjected to electric shocks. We take all accounts of mistreatment seriously and, subject to the agreement of the person who has made the allegation, will engage with local authorities as soon as possible to seek to ensure treatment in accordance with international human rights standards.

When we have evidence that abuses have taken place, we will also persist when local officials either deny the allegations or dismiss the seriousness of what has happened. In 2012, after many years of discussions with the authorities in a country in Asia, we received reports detailing two investigations into numerous allegations of torture. Although there is still further work to be done on these cases, it was the first time we have received a formal response from the authorities or seen an investigation take place in the country concerned. In another case we were also successful after a number of representations in getting leg irons removed from a British prisoner.

In 2013, we will continue to work closely with our partners to assist British nationals imprisoned overseas, and will raise legitimate concerns about their welfare and treatment. They include some of the most vulnerable people in our consular caseload. In line with the FCO's efforts to do more for the most vulnerable, we will endeavour to build on the assistance we offer, and to ensure that all detainees are treated in line with internationally accepted standards.

Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is one in which one or both spouses do not, or cannot, consent to the marriage and where duress is involved. Duress can take the form of physical, psychological, financial, sexual or emotional pressure. Forced marriages are different from arranged marriages. In arranged marriages the families of both spouses take a leading role in arranging the marriage, but the final choice of whether or not to marry remains with the prospective spouses. Many forced marriages have an overseas element, where a British national is sent abroad to be married against their will, or made to sponsor a visa for a foreign spouse after a forced marriage has taken place.

The UK Government is committed to making forced marriage a criminal offence. This will also cover luring, or intending to lure, someone overseas to the UK for the purpose of marriage. Breaches of Forced Marriage Protection Orders (the existing civil route to protecting potential victims) will also become a criminal offence to increase protection for victims and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

During 2012, the UK continued to lead this issue globally through the work of the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), a joint initiative by the FCO and the Home Office. The FMU runs a helpline for victims of forced marriage and authorities and officials seeking advice on handling forced marriage cases. It supports victims of any nationality in the UK and helps British nationals at risk abroad as well as people who have previously been forced into marriage and are being pressured into sponsoring a visa for their spouse. The FMU also runs an extensive outreach programme and develops policy on forced marriage.

In 2012, the FMU provided assistance to over 1,600 forced marriage victims in over 50 countries, an increase of 9% on the previous year; 15% of the victims were male and 85% female. The oldest victim was 89 and the youngest was two years old. The assistance provided often involved returning victims to the UK after they had been forced into marriage overseas. For example, a young woman taken to Somalia and forced into marriage returned with her children to the UK, where she is now rebuilding her life, with the assistance of the FMU. The FMU also funded women's shelters and refuges in India and Pakistan to accommodate victims while they are waiting to return to the UK after a forced marriage.

The FMU continued to raise awareness of forced marriage and the support available for potential victims. In 2012, it ran 50 outreach events for schools, community groups, the police, social workers and health professionals. It also ran a major campaign in the summer using digital media and aimed at reaching potential victims before the holiday period, when they were most likely to be taken overseas. This involved commissioning several short films based on real forced marriage cases, and which are available on the FCO's YouTube channel:
www.youtube.com/user/ukforeignoffice

Our embassies and high commissions around the world continued to conduct outreach programmes aimed at combating forced marriage. In late January and early February, the British High Commission in Islamabad sponsored a visit by local community leaders, led by the Mufti of Mirpur, to the UK to engage the diaspora community here on the issue. In Bangladesh, the British High Commission ran a poster campaign in airports, shopping malls

and other high-profile locations in Dhaka and Sylhet, leading to several approaches for help from victims.

Throughout the year, we continued to lobby internationally for commitment to tackling forced and early marriage. We co-hosted an event on forced marriage with the NGO Plan UK at the UN Commission on the Status of Women meeting in New York in February. We established an International Partnership Board with London embassies to compare approaches to tackling forced marriage with other partner countries. We also hosted an international conference in Dubai for consular staff and other embassies to share best practice between our overseas missions and pool our experience with other countries.

Our focus in 2013 will be on developing the legislation to criminalise forced marriage. We are hoping to introduce this to Parliament in the 2013/14 session. We will also continue to raise awareness across communities in the UK and work to increase the level of support provided to victims.

Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. It is medically unnecessary, extremely painful and has serious health consequences both at the time when it is carried out and in later life.

The UK Government is committed to eradicating FGM. The Female Genital Mutilation Act was introduced in 2003 and came into effect in March 2004. The act makes it illegal to practise FGM in the UK. It is an offence to take girls who are British nationals or permanent residents of the UK to another country for FGM regardless of its legality in that country. In addition it is illegal to aid, abet, counsel or procure its practice abroad.

Our objective 2012 was to play a central role in the UK Government's approach to tackling FGM, working with the Home Office, the Department of Health and the Department for Education. During the summer, we played an active part in the UK Government's crackdown on FGM during the summer holiday period. We also trained consular staff in East Africa to highlight the issues and to ensure that staff were able to respond to possible cases of FGM.

In 2013, we will continue to work with other leading government departments to eradicate FGM.

Child Abduction

The UK is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, an international treaty which aims to ensure that children who are abducted and wrongfully retained overseas are returned to where they normally live for custody matters to be resolved by the local courts. More than 80 countries are party to the convention, which we believe offers the most effective way of resolving child abduction cases in the best interests of the child. In countries which are not parties to the Hague Convention, parents

often face lengthy and expensive court proceedings to try to secure the return of abducted children. Many are ultimately unsuccessful.

We provide consular assistance in individual cases of child abduction involving British nationals. In 2012, we assisted in 230 cases, mainly in non-Hague Convention countries. We offered advice and information, helped parents to find local lawyers and to contact relevant foreign authorities, conducted consular visits and made political representations. In one case we were able to help reunite a father with his children after their mother had taken them to a country in South Asia, after advising him to seek custody through the local courts and supporting him while he did so.

We take a holistic approach to resolving child abduction cases, working closely with the UK NGO Reunite, lawyers' bodies, police, other government departments and children's services across the UK. In May, we worked with the National Policing Improvement Agency to develop and deliver a programme of seven training seminars for police offices in different forces across the UK, increasing understanding of the steps needed to prevent or resolve cases where children are forcibly removed overseas by a parent.

Over the last 10 years, the number of parental child abductions has risen steadily, and we expect a growing demand for our assistance in 2013. In an effort to reduce the number of cases, we continued to raise awareness of the problem. In December, we launched our annual media campaign, underlining the devastating and lasting impact of abduction on the children involved, highlighting the steps parents can take to prevent their children from being abducted and encouraging individuals affected by the issue to contact us for advice.

As well as offering support to those affected by parental child abduction, we continued to encourage foreign governments to sign the 1980 Hague Convention. We worked closely with Japan, Russia, India and Pakistan to increase understanding of the convention. FCO ministers also raised the issue with their counterparts in a number of South Asian countries. We supported the visit to the UK of a delegation of Japanese judges in June, and funded members of the NGO Reunite to visit Pakistan in April and South East Asia in September. These visits allowed us to increase understanding of the 1980 Hague Convention and share the UK's experience in implementing it. In July, the UK Government ratified the 1996 Hague Convention on Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children, a treaty which will support the measures for return available under the convention.

We will continue this work in 2013, including by funding Lord Justice Mathew Thorpe, judicial Head of International Family Justice for England and Wales, to visit Beijing, and by supporting a delegation of UK family law practitioners visiting Japan. We hope that ongoing efforts to highlight to foreign governments the benefits of the 1980 Hague Convention will encourage more countries to become parties and will lead to more effective resolution of international parental child abduction cases.

SECTION VII: Working through a Rules-based International System

The UN, the EU, the Commonwealth, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) form a network of international institutions which provide a framework of laws, standards and tools through which the UK can pursue its human rights work, and which bring a significant multiplier effect to our efforts.

Details on our human rights work in the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), the General Assembly 3rd Committee (UNGA 3rd Committee) and the Security Council (UNSC) can be found in **Section I**.

The European Union

The EU is committed to the defence of human rights and democracy both within its 27 member countries and in its external relations. It works to ensure that member states comply with the high standards of democracy, the rule of law and respect for fundamental freedoms set out in the EU's founding treaties. It monitors whether aspiring accession states adhere to these standards, which are pre-requisites for becoming members of the EU. And as the world's largest aid donor and a global economic actor of central importance, the EU is well placed to use its collective weight to promote respect for human rights and democracy across the globe.

EU enlargement

The EU is founded on the values of "respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities". The treaties stipulate that any European state that respects and is committed to promoting these values may apply to become a member of the EU. Candidate states progress towards full membership on the basis of their merits in meeting the accession criteria, which include political obligations on their institutions to guarantee respect for human rights. This requirement serves as a powerful incentive for generating good human rights records in countries seeking EU membership.

The UK Government strongly supports EU enlargement and is committed to supporting the membership aspirations of any European country that meets the criteria. We encourage the EU to conclude accession negotiations only when we are confident that a candidate country is able to meet the political, economic and legal obligations of membership. We work with the EU, its member states and institutions, as well as with accession country partners to ensure that the membership criteria are effectively met and that aspirant countries have the tools to meet the tough EU standards. We also work with the enlargement countries bilaterally to support their reform efforts.

In its October 2012 Annual Enlargement Strategy, the European Commission noted that while "strengthening the rule of law and democratic governance is central to the enlargement process", reforms remain "pending in most enlargement countries", with human rights one of the major challenges. The EU enlargement process must continue to ensure that it can address these challenges, and that it remains a credible lever for reform in the countries of

the Western Balkans and Turkey and serves as an example for other aspirant countries. This is why the UK welcomes the commission's "new approach" to EU enlargement that aims to address the important rule of law chapters of the accession negotiations from the start of the process to ensure that candidates have the maximum time possible to develop effective track records.

Montenegro, which opened accession negotiations in June, will be the first country to negotiate under the "new approach". This represents an essential refinement to the accession process, which takes into account lessons from previous accessions and ensures an increased quality of focus on important areas including human rights.

Croatia is expected to join the EU on 1 July 2013 and become the 28th EU member state, following six years of negotiations. Croatia has been the first candidate required to negotiate an additional rule of law-related chapter (Chapter 23) with a specific focus on the judiciary and fundamental rights.

We continue to support the work of the Croatian government as they approach the end of their accession process, including through projects to support their probation service, the effectiveness of court administration and the work of NGOs, including a project to fund an anti-corruption adviser to help local NGOs understand their rights to access information under the government's new Freedom of Information Act. We continue to support three Croatian NGOs which monitor the country's domestic war crimes trials, including progress in handling the backlog and the issue of impunity, which remain major challenges. We also supported in 2012 projects which promoted changes in legislation on handling war rapes in Croatia, and which increased the capacity of law enforcement authorities to deal with hate crimes.

The EU will continue to monitor Croatia's human rights record in the run-up to its accession in 2013. The European Commission, in its October 2012 Comprehensive Monitoring Report, called on Croatia to "sharpen its focus" to ensure that the remaining reforms are completed in full before accession.

As the European Commission noted in its 2012 progress report, there is still more to do on human and minority rights in **Serbia**. The cancellation of the 2012 Belgrade Pride parade because of domestic political reasons for the second year running – despite calls by the UK and others urging the Serbian government to allow to it to take place – served as a reminder of the challenges. We will continue to support projects on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights and wider anti-discrimination measures. We funded adult (Serbian) language education for ethnic Albanians to remove a barrier to their integration and the full enjoyment of their human rights, and also the creation of a national anti-discrimination strategy aiming to protect minorities more widely. In 2013, we will continue to lobby for and fund projects supporting ethnic minority rights, inter-ethnic reconciliation, access to justice and the role of civil society. If Serbia begins accession negotiations in 2013, Chapter 23 covering fundamental rights will be a useful tool for encouraging further progress in the promotion of human and minority rights.

We encourage Serbia to continue its cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which the European Commission stated in its 2012 progress report on Serbia was "fully satisfactory".

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, we continued to lobby at all levels for progress on reforms that would align the constitution more closely with the European Convention on Human Rights. When he visited Sarajevo in October, the Foreign Secretary raised this issue with the Bosnian Presidency, pressing for early implementation of the European Court of Human Rights Judgment on Sejdic-Finci versus Bosnia and Herzegovina, which ruled that the inability of national minorities to stand for election to the Presidency or upper chamber of the Parliamentary Assembly was discriminatory.

We continued to fund technical assistance in the Bosnia and Herzegovina justice and security sector and to support the implementation of the State Law on Missing Persons and the 2008 National War Crimes Strategy. We funded secondments to the State Prosecutor's Office to support development of an efficient and sustainable system for processing war crimes cases, maintaining a focus on crimes committed in Srebrenica. We also helped with other projects on developing guidelines and training on witness protection and on preventing human trafficking.

In 2013, we will focus on new initiatives to support the prevention of sexual violence in conflict, addressing both impunity in the justice sector and legacy issues still affecting victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to improve the transparency and accountability of government at all levels.

Kosovo made progress on human rights in 2012 but more needs to be done, including on the promotion and protection of the religious and cultural heritage, notably with the Serbian Orthodox Church. Existing legislation on the historic centres of Prizren and Velika Hoča/Hoçë e Madhe needs also to be fully implemented. On the protection of minorities, targets for minority representation in the civil service need to be met, particularly in the police, as this will boost minority communities' confidence in the investigation of crimes, particularly when they appear to be ethnically motivated.

The UK remains the biggest bilateral donor in Kosovo supporting the return of internally displaced persons and refugees. We have funded the reconstruction of houses for Kosovo-Serb families in Prizren and for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) families in Istog. These projects, combined with the government's funding to the Kosovo Property Agency, which resolves property disputes relating to the 1999 conflict, contributed to ensuring that all communities are now able to exercise their right to live in their place of origin.

The Osterode refugee camp was closed in December after the last RAE families were successfully relocated to Roma Mahalla in south Mitrovica. The third stage of this project is to close the last camp in Leposavic. This will be part-funded by the EU and will begin in 2013.

The UK has been active in the promotion of women's rights in Kosovo. Under the ambit of the Foreign Secretary's **Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative** and to mark International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the British Embassy in Pristina held a

round table attended by President Jahjaga and a number of survivors to draw attention to the issue of sexual violence during the 1999 conflict. The UK also supported a project training safe-house staff, social workers and police officers to help reduce domestic violence against women and integrate victims back into society.

In 2012, we continued to support the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), which aims to build a cohesive and peaceful society and is integral to **Macedonia's** Euro-Atlantic integration, with work on capacity-building and recruitment policies aimed at creating more equitable representation of ethnic groups in the public sector.

Other support for human rights included work improving the Macedonian probation service, strengthening democracy through parliament, anti-discrimination policies and freedom of expression. The UK's National Offender Management Service and Ministry of Justice continued the work of the previous year to support the development of a probation system in place of default prison terms. In particular, UK expertise on system design should lead to improved standards on human rights within the Macedonian prison and sanctions system.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy, with embassy support, undertook the final year of a project to strengthen the capacity of parliament, introducing regulatory impact assessments which take into account the human rights impact of proposed legislation. We also supported the practical implementation of the National Strategy for Anti-Discrimination, which included training for anti-discrimination advisers, who will in turn train ministries on their legal obligations and best practice.

To improve media freedom within Macedonia, we supported the training of judges and prosecutors on Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Freedom of Expression).

Our work in **Albania** focused on democracy and justice. We fielded six teams of election monitors to support the OSCE during the May 2011 local elections, and hope to offer similar support for the general elections in 2013. We funded an OSCE expert to advise on electoral reforms which were passed by parliament in July and were one of Albania's main achievements on the EU accession agenda during 2012. We are co-funding OSCE training for the newly constituted Central Electoral Commission. We provided funding to begin several projects to improve the justice system. The UK is also leading an EU-funded project to establish a probation service in Albania, which has been successful to the extent that there are now more offenders on probation than in prison.

As a result of work with the British Council to promote diversity and equality in Albania, Albania sent its first ever competitor to the London 2012 Paralympic Games. We have in addition lobbied, with international partners, for improved gender equality and increased efforts by the government and police to tackle domestic violence.

We continue to be a strong supporter of **Turkey's** accession to the EU. We believe that the accession process, which has prompted reforms in areas such as civilian control of the military and the independence of the judiciary, provides impetus for the country's modernisation. Significant results have been achieved but, as the Turkish government itself

recognises, more progress is needed. The European Commission's 2012 Annual Progress Report set out areas of concern, particularly around freedom of expression.

In July, Turkey released its third judicial reform package, which according to the Ministry of Justice, led to the release of 8,600 detainees whose time in detention had exceeded new limits. Two further promising developments were the creation of a national human rights institution in October and an Ombudsman in November. Turkey also took steps to improve women's rights and gender equality by signing the Law on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women.

In 2012, we committed significant funds to support projects to promote human rights and EU standards across a broad range of issues. We will continue to work with Turkey to support their reform efforts in 2013. On a visit to Turkey in October, UK Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg announced an extensive joint UK–Turkey programme to train 360 lawyers on Chapters 23 (on the judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (on justice, freedom and security) of the EU *acquis*. We hope that significant progress can be made towards meeting EU standards on these chapters in 2013.

EU Common Foreign and Security Policy

The EU's commitment to promoting human rights and democracy is enshrined in the first article of the chapter in the Lisbon Treaty on the Common Foreign and Security Policy. This principle was reaffirmed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, when she said in June 2012 that she regarded human rights as "a silver thread that runs through everything that we do in external relations".

In June, EU foreign ministers agreed a Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy, the first comprehensive statement of the EU's values and commitments on human rights since 2001. It sets out the EU's human rights priorities, which include thematic issues such as freedom of expression online and offline, the rights and empowerment of women, freedom of religion or belief, the prevention of torture and the abolition of the death penalty. The Strategic Framework also describes how the EU will work with bilateral partners, civil society and multilateral institutions to deliver these priorities. Ministers also agreed an Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, which sets out in detail, and for the first time in a public document, exactly how the EU institutions and EU member states will work to promote human rights and democracy. The Action Plan contains 97 specific objectives, each of which has an individual deadline. Subjects covered include providing effective support to democracy around the world, supporting human rights defenders, and continuing the EU's work on local human rights country strategies, which tailor the EU's work on human rights and democracy on a country-by-country basis to achieve maximum impact. The objectives in the Action Plan complement the priorities set out in the Strategic Framework, and the two texts should be read together. Finally, the EU appointed a Special Representative for Human Rights, Mr Stavros Lambrinidis, in September. Mr Lambrinidis is a former Foreign Minister of Greece, and is the first EU Special Representative with a thematic, rather than geographical, mandate. He will be a visible figurehead for the outside world on the EU's action on human rights beyond its own borders.

These new measures complement the existing wide range of mechanisms and policies at the EU's disposal to promote and uphold human rights internationally. These include human rights guidelines on key issues such as torture prevention and the death penalty, more than 40 human rights dialogues with third countries (a dialogue with South Africa, the most recent to have been established in November), sanctions, human rights clauses in political and economic agreements with third countries and programme funding and development aid. Under this framework, the EU, including the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has frequently spoken out on particular areas of concern and lobbied individual governments on their human rights records and on individual cases.

In addition, the UK has taken a lead role in securing EU sanctions in Iran, where the regime continues to violate human rights with impunity. We strongly support the EU position of not re-engaging fully with Belarus until all political prisoners have been released and the authorities commit to real reform.

The EU plays an active role in UN human rights forums and has presented resolutions on freedom of religion or belief and on the human rights situations in Burma and DPRK (the latter jointly with Japan).

The EU's own Annual Report on Human Rights for 2012 will be published in 2013 and will focus on the EU's work on human rights and democracy issues abroad. In view of the adoption of the Action Plan in June 2012, this year's annual report will be restructured in order to report on the EU's progress in delivering against the plan.

European Neighbourhood Policy

Human rights and democracy are a core element of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU's main framework for engaging with the countries which share its borders to the east and south. Through the ENP, the UK can extend its own reach in pursuit of its human rights objectives.

The EU holds a regular constructive dialogue with Georgia on human rights, most recently in June. Talks covered a wide range of issues, including the rights of minorities and internally displaced persons and the human rights situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Selective justice and rule of law remained concerns in **Ukraine.** The December, EU Foreign Affairs Council conclusions made clear that progress on the proposed Association Agreement depended on Ukraine acting in accordance with EU values. Earlier in the year, the EU called on Ukraine not to implement proposed legislation that would discriminate against the LGBT community.

There were some positive developments in the conduct of the October parliamentary elections, which were judged to have delivered results reflecting the wishes of the Ukrainian people. The election campaign itself, however, was described by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) observers as lacking a level playing field due to abuse of administrative resources and unbalanced media coverage.

The **Republic of Moldova** made good progress in negotiations for an EU–Moldova Association Agreement in 2012, boosted by the election of a President in March after 917 days without a permanent Head of State. In February, the Moldovan parliament adopted an Action Plan on Justice Sector Reform, unlocking a possible €52 million in further budgetary support from the EU, focused on human rights in justice. Implementation of the Action Plan should begin to address widespread corruption and lack of independence of the judiciary. The government continues to have no *de facto* control over the Transnistria region, making it difficult to enforce country-wide human rights standards.

The conduct of **Armenia**'s parliamentary elections in 2012 was an improvement on the presidential elections in 2008. But even though the poll was conducted under a new electoral code, the OSCE observer mission raised concerns about the implementation of the code in practice. Bearing in mind it is an election year, Armenia will also need to ensure that there is public confidence in the accuracy of its electoral list and that it will not be open to abuse.

A democratically elected government is in place in **Tunisia**, and is on course towards a new and broadly supported constitution. But challenges remain, including the increase in violence by extremist elements and the need to address economic reform. The UK remains committed to working with the EU to support democratic transition in Tunisia. The EU has allocated almost €400 million of support through the ENP for the period 2011–13, an increase of approximately 40% since before the Arab Spring. In November, Tunisia finalised an Action Plan with the EU, which will support the building of democracy, the rule of law, good governance and development of human rights. The EU aims to start negotiation on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with Tunisia in 2013.

In **Lebanon,** the EU has identified the death penalty, detention conditions, Palestinian refugees and domestic migrant workers as the main priorities in its human rights strategy. Both parties have committed to work on these issues within the framework of the EU–Lebanon ENP Action Plan, as well as on women's and children's rights, human rights in law enforcement and implementing the agreed recommendations in the UN's Universal Periodic Review for Lebanon. Lebanon launched a national human rights strategy in December, which outlines the actions the state will take to address these issues, and it has pledged to establish a national human rights institution in accordance with EU and UN recommendations.

Jordan holds regular subcommittee meetings with the EU to discuss human rights matters linked to the implementation of the 2011 ENP EU–Jordan Action Plan (the first ENP partner country to do this). The EU funded a number of human rights projects in Jordan in 2012. It reaffirmed support for the work on political reform to date, but also highlighted areas where additional steps were needed. These included the consolidation of the rule of law, the rights of women and children and freedom of expression, where concerns were cited regarding a new press and publications law. The EU welcomed the constitutional amendment in September 2011, which outlawed torture. The UK supported projects aimed at eradicating torture and ill-treatment in practice. The EU welcomed the creation of an Independent Electoral Commission and sent an electoral observation mission to observe the January 2013 parliamentary elections. The EU and UK have also supported Jordan in accepting over 200,000 refugees fleeing from Syria.

The Commonwealth

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 54 countries committed to the shared values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The UK sees the Commonwealth as an important partner to promote democracy and human rights globally.

We believe that the Commonwealth's reputation has in recent years been damaged by its silence on human rights concerns in some member states. Against this background, the UK Government is committed to strengthening the organisation to enable it to promote more effectively its core shared values. Our focus in 2012 was on work to improve its institutions and mechanisms. Our broader policy aim is to help the Commonwealth target its limited resources more closely on areas where it can add value and have a positive impact, such as its well-respected election observation work, its convening and advocacy power, and its focus on supporting small states.

Our activities in 2012 built on the outcomes of the Perth Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in 2011, where it was agreed that the Commonwealth's core values should be set out in a Commonwealth Charter; the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) should have a stronger mandate to deal with serious and persistent violations of those values; the Secretary-General should have a more vocal role; and further consideration should be given to a proposal to appoint a Commonwealth Commissioner for Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights.

In 2012, the UK played a prominent role in discussions on modernisation. First Lord Howell and subsequently Mr Swire, as Minister for the Commonwealth, helped to secure positive outcomes at a specially convened Ministerial Task Force meeting in June and at the Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers meeting in September. On 19 December, the Secretary-General and Prime Minister Gillard of Australia (Chair-in-Office) announced that Heads of Government had endorsed a number of reforms and agreed the Commonwealth Charter.

The Commonwealth Charter was agreed on 14 December. It opens with the Commonwealth's commitments to democracy and human rights and includes clear language on opposition to discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or on any other grounds. It also affirms a commitment to freedom of expression, gender equality, rule of law, good governance and the role of civil society. See the charter online at: www.thecommonwealth.org/files/252053/FileName/CharteroftheCommonwealth.pdf

As part of the reform package, Commonwealth Heads of Government agreed to address the "specific needs of women in all aspects of law, public policy and public resources" to ensure that they are not discriminated against in law or practice; to take steps to encourage the repeal of discriminatory laws that impede an effective response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic; and to establish or strengthen independent national or regional human rights institutions in accordance with the UN's Paris Principles. They also agreed stronger roles for the Commonwealth Secretariat's election observation work and its advocacy of women's issues.

The UK supported the proposal for the appointment of a Commonwealth Commissioner for Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights to serve as an independent figure to provide

well-researched, reliable information on serious or persistent violations of democracy, rule of law and human rights in Commonwealth member states, and to propose action to address them. Despite our advocacy, there was widespread opposition to the proposal, however, on the grounds that the role would duplicate those of the Secretary-General and CMAG, and no consensus could be reached. Instead, it was agreed that additional resources would be allocated to support and enhance engagement by the Secretary-General and CMAG with member states on issues of concern. We welcome this commitment and look to the Secretary-General to ensure that it is incorporated into the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The UK, although not currently a member of CMAG, has supported implementation of its stronger mandate. We welcomed the group's response to the political crisis in the Maldives in February. We also note that the Secretary-General has begun to use his enhanced role to raise the profile of the Commonwealth, including by issuing more public statements on human rights concerns. We would, however, like to see CMAG address a broader range of human rights concerns and make a larger contribution to raising human rights standards across the Commonwealth.

In 2013, the UK will work to support implementation of the reforms which have been agreed. We want to embed the charter as a tool to protect and promote Commonwealth core values, and will work to raise its profile in the UK, particularly among Parliament, civil society and young people. We will continue to engage with the Commonwealth on human rights issues and encourage a stronger, more active role for CMAG in responding to human rights concerns. In parallel, as they adopt a new strategic work plan, we will press the Secretariat to implement their commitment to increase resources in support of CMAG's work.

The next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) will be held in Sri Lanka in November 2013. Ahead of the meeting, we will continue to press Sri Lanka, as with any other CHOGM host, to demonstrate its commitment to upholding Commonwealth values of good governance and respect for human rights.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The UK Government values the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as a forum for political discussion and action on wider European security issues, including the protection and promotion of human rights across the OSCE area. We support the work of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), particularly its election observation activities, and that of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

In 2012, the UK worked closely with EU partners, the United States and others to ensure that UK human rights priorities were reflected in the OSCE's work. In particular, we identified the potential that the OSCE has to promote freedom of religion or belief. The UK has nominated strong candidates for the OSCE's freedom of religion or belief advisory panel. Selection is due in early 2013. We also hosted a lively and well-attended event on this issue at the OSCE's annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. The UN's

Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief participated, and the event provided practical suggestions on where the OSCE/ODIHR might best focus its efforts.

We continued to identify and provide UK nationals to fill key roles in the OSCE, including in the OSCE's 16 field offices. In a busy year for elections in the OSCE region, we funded British nationals to take part in ODIHR election observation missions in several OSCE states, including Kazakhstan, Russia, Armenia, Serbia, Belarus, Georgia, Montenegro, Ukraine and the USA. The UK also contributed to an ODIHR fund that seeks to broaden the range of countries that participate in OSCE election observation missions.

The UK continued to lead in the OSCE in 2012 in responding to hate crime. Our support included involvement in the delivery of the Training Against Hate Crimes for Law Enforcement programme 'TAHCLE' in a number of OSCE-participating states, to improve police skills in recognising, understanding and investigating hate crimes. The UK also contributes to an ODIHR advisory group that will produce guidelines in 2013 on the gathering of hate crime data.

As Chair of the OSCE in 2012, Ireland set a focused and realistic agenda of human rights issues, with particular emphasis on freedom of the media and tolerance and non-discrimination. We strongly supported this agenda. The political dynamic in the OSCE remains a barrier to delivery of its significant potential to promote positive change. As happened in 2011 under the Lithuanian Chairmanship, the need for unanimous agreement continued to frustrate progress, particularly in attempting to reach agreements on human rights. We were disappointed and concerned that it again proved impossible to reach consensus on any new ministerial decisions in the Human Dimension at the OSCE annual Ministerial Council in Dublin in December. We had attached particular importance to the Irish Chair's proposals for a decision on media freedom, particularly in the online context. We hope that Ukraine, who hold the Chair in 2013, will continue this work.

The UK is committed to contribute fully in 2013 to the OSCE's work to protect and promote human rights, particularly where democracy remains fragile, or basic human rights appear under threat. We will support the work of the OSCE's autonomous human rights institutions, publicly condemn serious human rights violations, seek to make OSCE activities more focused on core human rights issues and help to protect the important role of civil society in holding governments to account.

The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organisation with 47 member states who work together to establish and implement common standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The UK held the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's decision-making body, from 7 November 2011 to 23 May 2012. The overarching theme of our chairmanship was the promotion and protection of human rights.

Our key priority during our chairmanship was the reform of the European Court of Human Rights. The Court had a backlog of approximately 150,000 applications and needed help to

ensure that it focused on the most important cases and was supported by better implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights at national level.

The Brighton Declaration was agreed on 20 April, following several months of negotiation. This sets out a series of concrete reforms and re-affirms member states' commitments to the convention and agreement that the primary responsibility for guaranteeing human rights rests with the governments, parliaments and courts of the member states.

We are now working to secure the effective implementation of the Brighton Declaration. By January 2013, the court's backlog had fallen to 128,000 applications.

Another priority during our chairmanship was support for the rule of law. On 2 March, the UK held a conference at Lancaster House, in partnership with the Venice Commission and the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law. The Venice Commission is now developing a checklist for governments on how to ensure compliance with the rule of law, and practical guidelines which will add value to the work of policy-makers and legislators drafting and passing laws across Europe.

Also in March, the UK's then Equality Minister, Lynne Featherstone, hosted a conference in Strasbourg on combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. The conference provided an opportunity to share best practice on tackling discrimination in education, the workplace and sport, as well as tackling prejudice-based violence and hate crimes against LGBT people, and steps to advance transgender equality. Since then, the Committee of Ministers has discussed further how to take forward these issues in Europe and is preparing to review the implementation of its pioneering standards in this field. The UK is also a donor to the Council of Europe's LGBT project, which is working in partnership with European governments to help reform public attitudes, legislation and practice.

Freedom of expression on the Internet was another area we addressed during our chairmanship. The Committee of Ministers agreed a four-year strategy on Internet governance, working in cooperation with governments, the private sector and NGOs. The UK is a strong supporter of the Council of Europe's Cybercrime Convention, and for the second year is contributing to the Council's Global Project on Cybercrime.

On 8 June, the UK signed the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. This groundbreaking convention goes further than any other international instrument in recognising and dealing with all forms of violence against women and domestic violence. It accords with the Government's strong commitment to combating violence against women and promoting women's rights more broadly.

The Council of Europe appointed a new Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Nils Muižnieks, in April. Since his appointment he has conducted country-monitoring visits to Italy, Portugal, Austria and Finland, and has issued over 20 statements on human rights concerns in Council of Europe member states.

Sanctions

When the international community seeks to respond to the abuse of human rights by a government, group or individual, sanctions can be an effective tool in constraining unacceptable activities or forcing a change in behaviour. Sanctions often involve restrictions on international trade. These may include a ban on the sale of certain goods and equipment to a country, or prohibitions on doing business with certain individuals, organisations and companies.

International sanctions are usually agreed at a senior level in the UN or the EU, either at the UN Security Council or in the Council of the European Union. As the UK representative at these negotiations, the FCO consults other government departments to ensure that restrictions are targeted, effective and proportionate, and that any commercial or economic impacts on the UK are considered and minimised.

In March, EU member states agreed an amendment to the EU Iran sanctions regime in response to the human rights situation in the country. The amendment introduced an embargo on technology that could be used by the Iranian regime to monitor Internet, telephone or mobile communications.

Members of the Nova Gradiška Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing meet the President of Croatia, Ivo Josipovic, as part of the British Embassy Zagreb's BPB funded project

SECTION VIII: Promoting Human Rights in the Overseas Territories

On 28 June, the UK Government published a White Paper, "**The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability**", setting out its approach to our Overseas Territories.[1]

Our fundamental responsibility is to ensure the security and good governance of the Territories and their peoples. This responsibility flows from international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. It also follows from our shared history and political commitment to the well-being of all British nationals. This requires us, among other things, to promote the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the people of the Territories, to ensure their just treatment and their protection against abuses, and to develop their self-government and free political institutions.

The UK and the Territories share a common agenda to promote and protect human rights and tackle discrimination. The UK Government expects the Territories to abide by the same standards of human rights as the UK. Each Territory has its own constitution, and its own government has its own local laws, with substantial devolved responsibility for the conduct of internal affairs. The protection and promotion of human rights in each Territory is primarily, therefore, the responsibility of the Territory government.

The UK Government is responsible for ensuring that the Territories fulfil their obligations arising from international human rights conventions which have been extended to them. Territory governments have a duty in turn to ensure that local law complies with the relevant conventions and court judgments and is non-discriminatory. We expect Territories to take action, including legislating where necessary, in any areas of disparity to reach full compliance.

Constitutional and Legal Protection of Human Rights

Over the last decade, we have sought to modernise the constitutions of the inhabited Territories. Revised constitutions have included new or strengthened human rights chapters that reflect in particular the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Part I of the **Cayman Islands** Constitution Order 2009 setting out the Bill of Rights, Freedoms and Responsibilities came into effect on 6 November. Claimants are as a result no longer confined to seeking redress for human rights violations before the European Court of Human Rights but can do so in local courts.

[1] The 14 UK Overseas Territories are Anguilla; Bermuda; the British Antarctic Territory; the British Indian Ocean Territory; Cayman Islands; the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia in Cyprus; the Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; Montserrat; the Pitcairn Islands, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands (commonly known as the Pitcairn Islands); St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha; South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands; the Turks and Caicos Islands; and the Virgin Islands (commonly known as the British Virgin Islands).

The Cayman Islands Gender Equality Law 2011 took effect in January 2012. A Gender Equality Tribunal has been established to hear and determine discrimination complaints. In **St Helena** a National Human Rights Action Plan was approved in December 2011, leading to the establishment of a Human Rights Office. This office has worked with schools, the police and various civil society groups to build awareness and understanding of human rights under the Constitution of Saint Helena. The St Helena government has also been active in publicising the human rights clauses in the constitution by producing and widely distributing educational posters and publishing weekly newspaper articles that discuss rights under the constitution.

In 2009, the ministerial government, the House of Assembly and parts of the Constitution of the **Turks and Caicos Islands** were suspended after Sir Robin Auld's Commission of Inquiry identified a high probability of systemic corruption. Over the past three years, an interim administration led by the Governor has implemented a wide-ranging reform programme and put in place a robust framework for good governance. In addition to a new constitution which came into effect on 15 October, this includes revised laws on key issues such as entitlement to Turks and Caicos Islander status, clear regulations for public financial management and a strengthened public service. We fulfilled our commitment to return the Islands to a democratically elected government with the holding of general elections on 9 November.

The new constitution established a Human Rights Commission. The Human Rights Commissioner was fully involved in developing and enacting the Equality Ordinance in 2012. This supports and clarifies arrangements for the implementation of constitutional provisions on non-discrimination and commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights. Its intent is to ensure that all individuals are entitled to go about their daily lives without fear of discrimination and with protection from victimisation and harassment.

Extension of International Human Rights Conventions

The White Paper confirmed that we would continue our long-standing policy of encouraging the Territories to agree to the extension of UN human rights conventions that the UK has ratified, but extend these to the Territories only when they are ready to apply them. Most of the Overseas Territories are small islands or island groups and face resource and capacity constraints which affect their ability to consider or implement treaties.

In the White Paper we set out a commitment to work with all the populated Territories with a view to extending outstanding UN human rights conventions to them by the end of 2013. We pledged to support Territories that face resource and capacity constraints.

A joint DFID and FCO project on human rights included a one-year component to help Territories that had not already done so to seek to have the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) extended to them. The CEDAW component supported Territories in developing plans which included compliance reviews of their laws and administrative practices. We continue to encourage these Territories to take the remaining steps to enable them to have CEDAW extended to them.

Bermuda and the Cayman Islands had hoped to be in a position to request extension in 2012. We are working with the new leadership in both Territories to enable them to request extension of CEDAW in early 2013.

Human Rights Project Work

The UK supported a Commonwealth Foundation project which has provided training workshops, specialist assistance and advice to help Territory governments to improve the implementation of human rights, and we worked with civil society to raise awareness of human right issues. As examples, the Building Human Rights Capacity project supported a poster and booklet campaign in the Falkland Islands, training for civil servants, police and social workers in the British Virgin Islands, a workshop in the Pitcairn Islands, and proposals for a Human Rights Commission in St Helena.

Another key element of the project was to help the Overseas Territories to establish and resource Human Rights National Action Plans (NAPs). This is a long-term goal that requires political and financial commitment in the Territories. The project successfully helped St Helena to formulate a fully developed NAP; other Territories produced human rights matrices and delivered reports on their human rights needs. The project came to a close in March but we will continue to support Territories to develop their NAPs further, carry out the work outlined in these plans and address any identified gaps.

The UK-supported Safeguarding Children in the Overseas Territories (SCOT) project focuses on strengthening the protection of children, young people and their families by supporting policy-making, professional practice and inter-agency and regional collaboration. Although the main part of this project came to a close in March, some elements are continuing.

Child protection work on the Pitcairn Islands continues via child protection courses. Recently, three more Pitcairners have successfully completed the child protection course and bids are being considered for a further course.

Prison Reform in the Cayman Islands

At the request of the Cayman Island Government, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) carried out an inspection of Cayman Islands prisons in July. The Cayman Islands' government has already taken positive action to reform the prison system, including replacing the Director of Prisons, reviewing policies and procedures, creating a new senior position to lead on rehabilitation, and improving communication and trust within prisons through the creation of an inmate council.

The UK Government strongly supports prison reform in the Overseas Territories, and our view is that all Territories should aspire to UK standards. Although prison management is a devolved responsibility, we have an important supporting role. A British Overseas Territories Prison Reform Adviser, based in Miami, provides technical and strategic advice on prison

matters to Caribbean and Bermuda governments and Governors' offices, whilst UK-based advisers perform a similar function for the South Atlantic Territories.

A copy of the Cayman Island prison report can be found at:
www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmipris/other-jurisdiction-inspections/grand-cayman/cayman-islands-prison-2012.pdf

A follow-up inspection of prisons in the Cayman Islands will take place in 2014.

Looking Ahead to 2013

UK ministers and Overseas Territories' leaders met as the Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council in London in December where they agreed a communiqué that included a strong commitment to tackle discrimination.

"*We share a belief in tackling discrimination so that all citizens have an equal opportunity to play an active role in society. We recognise that addressing disability, child safeguarding, care of the elderly and providing opportunities for youth are areas that require cross-government responses to improve opportunities and provide safeguards. They are also areas that require support from communities, civil society organisations and business organisations to provide support and ideas*."

The UK and Territory governments agreed to work together to:

- improve the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate fully in society;
- improve ways of looking after vulnerable members of society, in particular strengthening capacity to care for ageing populations and particularly vulnerable families;
- improve strategies to ensure the safeguarding of children, based on a strong belief in zero tolerance to child abuse in whatever form it comes; and
- work to remove any other forms of discrimination in society.

The Joint Ministerial Council will enable us to take stock of progress and develop action plans for implementation of specific proposals. We will report progress to Parliament.

SECTION IX: Human Rights in the Countries of Concern

This section contains our review of the human rights situation in 27 countries where the UK Government has wide-ranging concerns. For this year's report, we decided to review thoroughly the criteria we use for deciding which countries are of most human rights concern to the UK. We drew on feedback from the Foreign Affairs Committee and consulted with the Foreign Secretary's Advisory Group on Human Rights in doing so. Our geographical directors, with input from our embassies and high commissions overseas, subsequently assessed all the countries in their regions against this newly revised set of criteria and human rights indicators to decide on a final list for countries and case studies to be included in this annual report. Ministers then made the final decision.

The criteria for inclusion were:

- the gravity of the human rights situation in the country, including both the severity of particular abuses and the range of human rights affected;
- whether a deterioration or improvement in the human rights situation in the country would have a wider impact in the region;
- whether the human rights situation in the country has an impact on wider UK interests; and
- how active the UK is in the country and our level of engagement there.

We carried out assessments based on the first criterion and refined these further using the other three criteria. In this way we reached a focused list but with an objective assessment of the human rights situation in each country at its heart. Following this process, Chad was the only country from last year's list to be removed from the countries of concern category as it did not fully meet the criteria. No new countries were added to the list.

We have, however, added more case studies where we report on countries which we do not class as "of concern", but which we judge to be on a trajectory of change with regard to human rights. While most focus on countries on a negative trajectory, in others we want to highlight a particular thematic issue. Countries on a negative trajectory remain subject to periodic in-year reporting to monitor developments.

The countries of concern and case studies are not an exhaustive list of countries where we think improvements are needed on human rights. Although the countries on which we report here will remain our priorities for 2013, we continue to engage with many other countries on human rights issues, through dialogue and project work. As in last year's report, we list the countries of concern in alphabetical order.

We will continue to report on developments in the **countries of concern** online on a regular basis and raise our concerns about human rights issues wherever and whenever they occur.

Afghanistan

The UK continues to offer practical and political support to the Afghan government to help it honour its national and international human rights obligations and commitments. The country has seen decades of conflict. It is not surprising that significant challenges and obstacles remain. Improving respect for human rights is a long-term project. Overall, there were both positive and negative developments in the human rights sphere in Afghanistan in 2012. Civil society led the debate about reform of the electoral process in a manner that has not occurred prior to previous Afghan elections. Civil society organisations also informed discussions between the international community and government of Afghanistan at the Tokyo Development Conference, and there continues to be space for open debate in the Afghan media. The UK has provided training for the security forces on human rights, but significant challenges remain in this area. It is also deeply worrying that those who commit violence against women are rarely brought to justice, and human rights defenders continue to face significant risks. We are committed to improving the rights of women, ensuring there is space for civil society organisations to operate without restrictions, and developing strong institutions ahead of the 2014 elections.

With some success, in 2012 we built on the human rights commitments made by the Afghan government and the international community at the Bonn Conference in December 2011. The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF), agreed at the Tokyo Development Conference on 8 July, reaffirmed the Afghan government's commitment to strengthen governance, including respect for human rights, the rule of law and the Afghan constitution. We welcomed the importance the May Chicago NATO Summit attached to a democratic Afghan society, based on the rule of law and good governance, where the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all its citizens are respected. The summit endorsed a Strategic Progress Report on mainstreaming UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security into NATO-led operations and missions. The first Afghanistan–UK Joint Commission meeting in October, to review implementation of the Afghanistan–UK Enduring Strategic Partnership Document signed in January, was co-chaired by Afghanistan's Deputy Foreign Minister Jawed Ludin and FCO Senior Minister of State Baroness Warsi. At this meeting, ministers reaffirmed both countries' commitment to the protection of human rights, especially women's rights. The UK contributed £500,000 to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to support its work on human rights, including the protection of human rights defenders.

In 2013, we will continue to support the Afghan government in implementing its TMAF commitments. The UK is due to co-chair the first review of the TMAF during 2014. Human rights, in particular women's rights, will be an important part of this review. We will continue our support to the AIHRC, and will encourage all Afghans to let it function without undue interference. In addition we will work to ensure that human rights considerations and the protection of women's rights are embedded in the transition process up to and during 2014. We will work for improved implementation of the Afghan Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law. In addition, Afghanistan will undergo its second UN Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council in 2013, having had its first in 2009.

Elections

The UK is committed to supporting the Afghan government in developing strong, open and accountable democratic institutions, including parliament. We welcome the Afghan government's commitment to electoral reform in support of holding credible, inclusive and transparent elections in 2014 in line with the constitution, as demonstrated both in the TMAF and in President Karzai's anti-corruption decree in July. The openness and extent of debate on electoral reform in the Afghan parliament amongst political parties and wider civil society has been encouraging, but there is still some way to go. Debate around the reforms continues; draft legislation has proven contentious and its passage through the legislature is likely to be challenging.

We welcomed the Afghan Independent Election Commission's (IEC) announcement that the presidential and provincial council elections would take place on 5 April 2014. The IEC has reaffirmed its commitment to an electoral process where all Afghans, including women and minorities, are able to participate fully. We will continue to press the IEC and Afghan government to deliver on their commitments over the coming year. The UK is the largest bilateral donor to a United Nations Development Programme led multi-donor programme supporting the delivery of the elections. Our assistance is supporting the work of the IEC's Gender Unit; improving voter education, including amongst women and other marginalised groups; and increasing the number and quality of IEC female staff. We look forward to implementation plans being finalised in early 2013.

We continued to provide funding to the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA), as well as working with a range of other organisations to ensure the full participation of all Afghans, in particular women, in future elections. Our funding also supports the development and participation of parties in the political process.

Freedom of expression and assembly

The principles of free speech and free media are enshrined in the Afghan constitution and legislation. However, journalists continued to face intimidation and restrictions.

In May, the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC) published a new draft media law. Civil society and human rights organisations expressed concern about the lack of public consultation in the drafting process, and the possible impact of some provisions on freedom of expression and association. For example, increased government representation on media commissions risked compromising the independence of the media in Afghanistan. In response, the MoIC agreed to improve consultation with these organisations during the drafting process. We will continue to work with international partners and Afghan organisations to monitor developments in this area.

Access to justice and the rule of law

We have worked extensively with the Afghan government to improve the justice system. Our focus has been on enhancing the ability to prosecute those responsible for serious crime. Projects included capacity-building in the Criminal Justice Task Force, which investigates and prosecutes serious narcotics offences, and mentoring support to the Afghan Attorney General's office.

NATO basic training of all new Afghan National Police (ANP) recruits includes human rights awareness. We support the EU Policing Mission's work to strengthen the capacity of the Inspector General's Office to prevent, investigate and prosecute wrongdoing within the Ministry of Interior and the ANP.

In Helmand Province, we supported efforts to strengthen governance and improve access to justice. We provided mentoring and case-tracking support to judges, prosecutors and Huquq representatives (Ministry of Justice officials who act as intermediaries between the formal and informal justice systems). We provided training for legal professionals on criminal procedure, judicial ethics and fair trials, and funded lawyers to give legal aid to defendants in criminal cases.

We supported the Afghan government's efforts in 2012 to tackle corruption through technical assistance on law enforcement and asset recovery. We will use the TMAF process to continue to press for more effective action on corruption, which remains endemic.

Death penalty

We were deeply concerned that in November 2012, following President Karzai's approval, 14 individuals convicted of serious crimes were executed, especially given that since 2007 there had only been one reported execution in Afghanistan – in 2011. With our EU partners, we called for the Afghan authorities to reintroduce the moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition of capital punishment, and we have made clear to the Afghan government the UK's opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances.

Prison and detention issues

We continue to encourage the Afghan government to carry out internal reforms to bring Afghanistan into full compliance with international standards on human rights. The international community and NGOs such as the AIHRC take a close interest in the treatment of detainees, and offer recommendations for improvements.

The UK takes allegations of the mistreatment of detainees seriously. In April, we suspended transfers of UK-captured detainees to the National Directorate of Security (NDS) in Lashkar Gah while a number of allegations of mistreatment there and at Helmand Provincial Prison (where those transferred would serve any prison sentence they received) were analysed, and further training and support provided. The UK Monitoring Team has continued to visit those UK-captured detainees transferred to Afghan custody before April to monitor their well-being. With the individual's consent, allegations of abuse and mistreatment are taken up with senior Afghan authorities and reported to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the AIHRC.

The UK implemented training and mentoring programmes, provided essential technical equipment to mitigate the risk of mistreatment, and encouraged further human rights reform and compliance with international standards within the NDS in 2012. Examples include training in how to manage a detention centre, human rights-compliant control and restraint training and a human rights course for detention officers in Kabul. We supported training by the UK's National Policing Improvement Agency for NDS investigators in interview skills and in using evidence. Training and professional development of NDS investigators to reduce

reliance on confessions as a means of securing prosecutions began in April and will continue into 2013.

We will continue to support the Afghan authorities in tackling mistreatment and to establish processes that reduce the risk of abuse of detainees. We support legal and institutional reform and will continue to invest in training, including on human rights, for those involved in the Afghan criminal justice system.

Women's rights

Men and women have equal rights under the Afghan constitution. Progress has been made on women's rights, including greater access to basic services such as health and education. There is a growing network of women's rights advocacy groups, and women's participation in public and political life has increased. More needs to be done by the Afghan government, however, to uphold its commitments to women's rights and to implement its international and national human rights obligations, including the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan, the National Priority Programme on human rights and social education, and human rights legislation such as the EVAW law. We will continue to support them in these efforts.

Afghan women are increasingly taking the lead in efforts to improve their position. In February, over 150 Afghan women and the Helmand Provincial Governor attended a women's shura (meeting) in Helmand – organised by the UK-led Provisional Reconstruction Team – to discuss women's and children's rights, including security, education, employment and the development of skills. However, women in Afghanistan generally still face huge challenges. In March, for example, the Ulema Council of Afghanistan, the senior official religious body, issued a statement on women's rights in Afghanistan. The statement condemned violence against women but also set out a strict code of conduct for women, reflecting the council's conservative Islamic views.

Violence against women and girls is particularly concerning. According to the UN, 87% of Afghan women will experience some form of violence during their lifetime. The December United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) report on the implementation of the EVAW law recognised the scale of the obstacles that remained but also noted some progress, particularly on the reporting of violence, which could be attributed to increased awareness of women's rights and better understanding of the law. We welcomed President Karzai's radio address to the nation in November condemning violence against women as being against the teachings of Islam and calling on religious scholars and community leaders to campaign to eliminate it.

UK ministers use every opportunity to raise women's rights during visits, as did Baroness Warsi in October and the Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening, in December. We will continue to push for progress on women's rights through our defence, development and diplomatic activities. These include political lobbying, projects to empower women to play a role in public life nationally and locally, practical support to women in their communities to help them improve their livelihoods and access to basic public services, and financial support for Afghan civil society organisations promoting women's rights, the AIHRC and the Ministry of Justice's Human Rights Support Unit. We

actively encourage increased participation of Afghan women in the FCO Chevening Scholarship programme to develop the skills and experience to become future leaders in Afghanistan. We will support the Afghan government in the development of their UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan. Extensive new project activity is also planned for 2013 to support women's leadership at a national level.

Conflict and protection of civilians

The UNAMA report in July on civilian casualties recorded 1,145 non-combatant deaths in the first six months of 2012, a reduction from 1,510 during the same period in 2011. Insurgents were responsible for 80% of the killings. UNSCR 2069, adopted on 9 October, strongly condemned all indiscriminate targeting of civilians. UNSCR 2069 also expressed serious concern about the high number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, in particular casualties among women and children, the majority of which are caused by Taliban, al-Qaeda and other violent extremist groups.

Members of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) take stringent measures to ensure the protection of civilians and to counter the threat posed by the insurgency. ISAF will continue to work with the Afghan government to put in place the most effective measures possible to protect the local population as the transition process continues and Afghan National Security Forces begin to take lead responsibility for security across the country.

Freedom of religion or belief

We work closely with our international partners to monitor religious freedom. We remind the Afghan government of its responsibility to abide by its national and international commitments and to respect the freedom of worship enshrined in Article 2 of the Afghan constitution. We have funded projects to promote religious tolerance and understanding, including a successful study visit to Egypt for 50 Afghan religious leaders, aimed at countering radicalisation and building understanding of the compatibility of Christianity and Islam.

Human rights defenders

Afghan civil society organisations have made some progress in increasing their presence, influence and strategic focus, in spite of operating in a challenging and often dangerous environment. The "Tawanmandi" project, jointly funded by the UK, Demark, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland and launched in October 2011, has provided grants to 66 Afghan civil society organisations, including 35 women's organisations. It is active in 18 Afghanistan provinces, working to improve access to justice and human rights, support peacebuilding, conflict resolution and media freedom initiatives and tackle youth and disability issues. UK funding will remain in place until 2016. We will continue to help the AIHRC and other leading human rights organisations in 2013 to identify when human rights defenders are under undue pressure and offer appropriate support.

Minority rights

At the Tokyo Development Conference, the Afghan government pledged to ensure that the human rights of all Afghan people, including minorities, are protected and promoted, as enshrined in Article 22 of the Afghan constitution. We will continue to remind the Afghan

government of the need to ensure the equal rights of all of its citizens and to uphold international human rights obligations.

Children's rights

The UK fully supports the UN's work to protect children in armed conflict. The AIHRC carries out a range of programmes which include promoting and protecting children's rights. We work to address violence against women and children through wider efforts to help reform the criminal justice system and through support for local NGOs. In addition, UK support through the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund enables the Afghan government to invest in children's education and provide access to basic healthcare.

In March, Afghanistan submitted its annual progress report to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on the implementation of their 2011 action plan against the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The report noted that although there has been progress in preventing child recruitment and other serious human rights violations, including a decrease in reported incidents of child abductions and sexual violence, some "non-government elements" continue to use children in armed conflict, and to target educational establishments.

A young girl pictured on International Women's Day in Helmand, Afghanistan. Nahr-e-Saraj is the only district in Helmand with female representation on the local District Community Council

Belarus

The UK remained concerned about the human rights situation in Belarus in 2012. The Belarusian government continued to use state apparatus to restrict space for genuine debate or dissent, and there was unabated harassment of opposition activists, human rights defenders and independent journalists. Three political prisoners were released but according to reports by non-governmental organisations, 10 political prisoners remain in jail under difficult conditions. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) said that the parliamentary election in September was "not held in an impartial manner". In March, the authorities executed two men convicted of carrying out the April 2011 Minsk Metro bombing, which killed 15 people, despite concerns about the evidence and the conduct of the trial and a request from the UN Human Rights Committee to delay the executions.

The UK's focus in 2012 was to keep up the pressure on the regime to improve its observance of human rights. With our European partners, we expanded targeted EU sanctions in February and March and renewed them in October. After the execution of those accused of the Minsk Metro bombing, the UK used its role as Chair of the Council of Europe to secure a rare **statement** by all 47 member states deploring the executions.

We argued successfully for the establishment of a Special Rapporteur on Belarus at the UN Human Rights Council in July, and Miklos Harazsti took up the role on 1 November. We provided a large contingent of observers to take part in the OSCE monitoring mission for September's parliamentary election. We continued to raise the case of the political prisoners, as well as the regular examples of politically motivated harassment by the authorities, with the Belarusian authorities.

We do not expect the situation in Belarus to change significantly in 2013. The UK will support the continued application of sanctions until the Belarusian government releases and rehabilitates all political prisoners. We will raise Belarus' human rights record regularly in international bodies such as the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. We will use the tools available through these organisations to continue to press for better human rights in Belarus, including for example by arguing for the renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur. We will also use the recommendations of the final monitoring report on the parliamentary election from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) to encourage Belarus to reform its electoral system. The UK will maintain its support for Belarusian civil society.

Elections

Parliamentary elections took place on 23 September. Some opposition politicians were unable to take part because of convictions for offences following the crackdown on opposition activity after the presidential election on 19 December 2010. This and other elements of the election process led to some opposition political parties deciding to boycott the poll, while others took part in the campaign but withdrew their candidates before voting day.

The elections were monitored by a mission from ODIHR, which included 18 British participants. Its **final report** concluded that the elections were not held in an impartial manner, and that there were particular problems with the count. It highlighted reports of the arrest of opposition activists in the run-up to the ballot for "hooliganism" or other offences. Those opposition parties that had called for a boycott of the election were barred from accessing free airtime on TV and radio following a ruling by the Central Election Commission (CEC). The monitoring mission judged that "... media coverage of the campaign did not provide a wide range of views, focusing overwhelmingly on the president and government activities with minimal attention given to candidates". An FCO spokesperson **called on the Belarusian government** to work constructively with the OSCE on further reforms. The Belarusian government rejected the conclusion of the ODIHR report. The UK will continue to press the authorities to adopt the ODIHR recommendations.

A separate monitoring mission conducted by the Commonwealth of Independent States concluded that the election was "free and democratic".

Freedom of expression and assembly

Belarus fell to 168th place out of 179 in the Reporters Without Borders World Press **Freedom Index 2011–2012** published in January 2012.

The state continued to control the overwhelming majority of media organisations. However, opposition and independent websites such as Charter 97 (**http://charter97.org/en/news/**) increased their readership in the country despite barriers to operating within Belarus and regular cyber attacks from unidentified sources. The authorities arrested Andrzej Poczobut, an independent journalist, in June. Currently on bail, he faces up to five years' imprisonment for defamation of the president. Dzyanis Kudryn, also a journalist, was allegedly beaten by a police officer for accessing an independent website in a public Internet cafe. Another journalist, Iryna Khalip, remains under strict supervisory conditions as a result of her conviction for taking part in the protests linked to the 19 December 2010 presidential election.

The state continued to interfere in freedom of assembly. For example, in September the authorities arrested people publicly supporting the election boycott by some opposition parties and also detained journalists covering the event. There were numerous cases of opposition activists being arrested for "hooliganism" or "swearing in the street", including in the run-up to the parliamentary elections.

Through these measures, the regime has further restricted the space to operate for those who oppose the government. The UK continued to press the government to allow independent media and greater freedom of expression.

Human rights defenders

In January, the Belarusian Supreme Court rejected an appeal from human rights defender Ales Bialiatski against his conviction for tax evasion. He will now serve the remaining four and a half years of his sentence. Bialiatski had been head of the Viasna Human Rights Centre; Viasna's offices were closed down in November. Similarly, Platform, a non-governmental organisation concerned with the rights and conditions of political prisoners,

lost an appeal in October against a court order to close down both its office and its organisation.

The regime used an undeclared travel ban to exert further pressure on human rights defenders, opposition activists and their associates. For example, on 6 June, Maryna Kavalewskaya, a lawyer who had represented one of the political prisoners, was prevented from travelling to Lithuania. The authorities told her it was because she had dodged the military draft, even though women are not obliged to carry out military service in Belarus.

In October, a British member of Amnesty International who had visited Belarus on many previous occasions was refused a visa. Amnesty International has not been given a reason, despite several enquiries.

The UK strongly supports EU programmes to offer support to those who fall victim to harassment by the authorities.

Access to justice and rule of law

On 15 April, Minister for Europe David Lidington welcomed the **release of two political prisoners**, former presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov and his former adviser Dmitry Bondarenko, on 14 and 15 April respectively. They had been arrested during peaceful protests on 19 December 2010 and convicted of "organising mass disturbances". The authorities released another political prisoner, Syarhei Kavalenka, on 26 September. All three men were made to apply for a presidential pardon before being released. As with all former political prisoners, the authorities did not restore their full civil and political rights. They are barred from taking part in future elections, face travel restrictions, are under threat of re-arrest and their criminal records mean that they have little chance of getting a job.

Following these releases, 10 political prisoners remained in detention at the end of 2012. Credible reports suggest that some faced psychological and physical pressure, particularly to submit pardon applications to the president admitting their guilt. In August, opposition activist Zmitser Dashkevich, who had been convicted in March 2011 of an alleged assault, had his sentence extended by a year for "deliberate disobedience" in prison. The British Ambassador raised his case with the authorities on 29 August, as did the Minister for Europe in a meeting with the outgoing Belarusian Ambassador on 12 September.

We continue to raise our concerns with the Belarusian authorities for the welfare of all political prisoners at every opportunity, both in Minsk and London. We believe that international pressure in part contributed to the few releases in 2012 and prevented the authorities acting with absolute impunity. Along with our EU partners we agreed further sanctions in February and March, including targeted economic measures against individuals and entities supporting and profiting from the regime. As we have reminded the Belarusian government on a regular basis, the sanctions will remain in place until all political prisoners are released and rehabilitated. The EU renewed the sanctions in October, with Council Conclusions outlining the EU's continued concern about the situation in Belarus. See: www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/132836.pdf

Following the February sanctions, the Belarusian government suggested that the heads of both the Polish Embassy and EU mission in Minsk should return to their capitals for "consultations". In response, the UK and all other EU member states present in Belarus recalled their ambassadors. The Foreign Secretary spoke of his **disappointment** at the behaviour of the authorities in Minsk. All the ambassadors returned to Belarus by the end of April.

Death penalty

On 14 March, the authorities executed Dzmitry Kanavalaw and Uladzislaw Kavalyow for allegedly carrying out the bomb attack on the Minsk Metro in April 2011 in which 15 people died. The pair were convicted in November 2011 in a trial that many international observers considered to be flawed. The executions took place on the same day that the President announced his refusal to grant clemency, and despite a request from the UN Human Rights Committee to delay the punishment until it had considered an application from one of the men to comment on the fairness of the proceedings. The men's families were not informed in advance of their executions and have not been told where they are buried. One person remains on death row for an unrelated conviction.

On 18 March, the Minister for Europe David Lidington voiced his **deep concern** at the executions and called on Belarus to establish a formal moratorium on the death penalty. We continued to raise the death penalty regularly with the Belarusian authorities, who said that the issue was likely to be put to a public vote again in the coming years. In the aftermath of the executions in March, the public mood in Belarus appeared to shift against the use of the death penalty – a trend which we will encourage.

Freedom of religion or belief

There was little change to the situation on freedom of religion or belief in Belarus in 2012. As with other non-governmental groups, some churches and religious organisations came under pressure from the authorities. For example, the New Life Church faced eviction from its premises on 5 December after a long battle with the Minsk authorities. The Embassy raised the Church's case with the Foreign Ministry on 3 December and the authorities shelved the evictions on 4 December.

Burma

The political and economic reforms that began in 2011 continued during 2012 under President Thein Sein. The UK Government's approach is one of cautious engagement, welcoming and encouraging reform while paying close attention to the human rights situation. Four UK Government ministers visited in 2012: the Foreign Secretary in January, the Prime Minister in April, Lord Marland in July and the FCO Minister for Asia, Hugo Swire, in December. During the Prime Minister's meeting with President Thein Sein, he welcomed recent reforms and highlighted areas where further progress was needed, including on political prisoners and ethnic reconciliation. The Prime Minister also met opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and assured her of the UK's continued support for her work to promote democracy and respect for human rights in Burma.

The UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly Third Committee adopted resolutions on Burma, recognising the progress made in many areas over the past 12 months and highlighting the concerns that remain, notably around ongoing ethnic conflict. The annual report by Special Rapporteur for the Human Rights Situation in Burma, Mr Tomás Ojea Quintana, following his three visits in 2012 set out a similar picture.

Elections

Burma held by-elections at the beginning of April for which the government relaxed restrictive laws on the media, civil society and political activists. Officials from the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the US and the EU, including from the UK Government, observed polling day informally; this was the first time that international observers – albeit in an unofficial capacity – had been permitted to watch any election in Burmese history.

According to independent reporting, there were no major irregularities, and voting was largely free and fair. The National League for Democracy party, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won 43 of the 44 seats that it contested.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Pre-publication censorship of private journals was ended in August but concerns about other forms of censorship remain. UN Special Rapporteur Mr Quintana expressed concerns in his annual report that post-publication article reviews by the government's censorship board would lead to self-censorship by journalists. Action was taken by the censorship board against the Burmese media, for example in August when *The Voice* newspaper was forced to close for two weeks following its reporting of unrest in Rakhine State.

A new and independent Press Council was established in September. Its role is to promote press freedom and the rights of journalists, improve the capacity of the media sector, set standards for journalistic ethics and feed in to the new media laws. A new print law is likely to be debated, daily private newspapers are due to be authorised and the broadcast law is expected to be revised in 2013.

Internet access in Burma is limited. Only a small percentage of the population, mainly in urban areas, have access. Previously blocked sites, oppositional political content and sites

with content relating to human rights and political reform were made accessible over the last 18 months.

Freedom to organise protests and other oppositional events expanded throughout 2012. During May, there were large-scale protests in Rangoon calling for improved provision of electricity and better workers' rights. On 1 May, events commemorating May Day were organised by various groups in Rangoon. One was attended by around 300 people, mainly comprising industrial workers and labour rights activists. An event of this nature would not have been possible during the last 50 years. On 5 July, the government adopted a decree on the Right to Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession, which recognised the duty of states to protect participants involved in peaceful assembly.

In some cases, however, peaceful protests were challenged officially, leading to concerns about the ability of the police to manage events of this nature. At the end of September, the police intervened following a peaceful protest to mark the International Day of Peace, leading to the arrest of 11 of the organisers for failing to obtain the permissions required under the regulations governing protests. In November, following the build-up of tensions over inadequate land compensation in the Letpadaung copper mine in Monywa, over 20 protesters were injured, some of them seriously, when the police intervened after several days of protests. The UK Government supported the Burmese government's decision to set up an Investigative Commission chaired by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to examine the issues raised by the protesters.

The government brought a new Labour Organisation law into force in 2012. The International Labour Organization (ILO) was invited to help bring it into line with international norms. Over 250 workers' organisations and 12 employer organisations have registered under the law to date. The Federation of Trade Unions of Burma can also now operate in the country.

Burma continues to face challenges related to the use of forced labour, but has made progress throughout 2012. The adoption of the Prisons Act in March outlawed the use of prisoners as porters under dangerous front-line conflict conditions. The ILO and the Burmese government developed a joint strategy for the elimination of forced labour in the country by 2015. The government made efforts to highlight the issue and how to make complaints. The ILO was invited to play an official role in the government's handling of complaints.

Human rights defenders, political prisoners and torture

Several hundred political prisoners were released from Burma's jails in 2012, including prominent 88 Generation (student activists) and ethnic leaders, in a continuation of the trend from 2011. Local political prisoner networks estimate that around 200 political prisoners remain. These cases will be examined by a new mechanism, announced by the government in November for all remaining cases. The International Committee of the Red Cross is to be granted access to all of Burma's jails, including the right to visit and assess prisoners, for the first time in many years.

Following the violence in Rakhine State in June, a prominent local Rohingya leader, Dr Tun Aung, his daughter, Nandar Aung (a UNHCR employee), and her husband, Maung Maung Than, were detained. Mr Swire raised their cases with the government and Nandar Aung and her husband were subsequently released without charge. Dr Tun Aung remains in detention and is reportedly unable to access treatment for a chronic medical condition.

Access to justice and the rule of law

The Burmese government has emphasised that rule of law is a priority. However, Burma has yet to sign and ratify important treaties which will embed international human rights norms into its legal system – in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture, and the Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court.

The UK organised a visit to Burma by the Human Rights Institute of the International Bar Association in July, which produced a report prioritising areas of future support. The report noted the Burmese government's willingness to strengthen the rule of law, but also the lack of capacity within the civil service. We also supported a number of NGO rule-of-law programmes to build capacity within the Burmese legal system.

The UK Government continued to support capacity-building in the Burmese parliament in 2012. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy carried out a scoping visit, and plans to support improvements in the scrutiny of public finance by sharing good practice from the UK Public Accounts Committee. In December, a cross-party delegation of three Burmese MPs visited London to spend time in the House of Commons and House of Lords and learn about the drafting and debating of UK law.

Conflict and protection of civilians

In Rakhine State, ethnic Rakhine Buddhists live alongside and interspersed with ethnic Rohingya Muslims. The Rohingya community is not recognised by the Burmese Citizenship Law of 1982 as a distinct ethnic group, and they are therefore not entitled to the rights that citizenship of the country would bring. This has led to historic tensions and to the marginalisation of the community, whose members are commonly referred to in Burma as "Bengalis".

Violence between members of the Rakhine Buddhist and Rohingya Muslim communities erupted in June, and again in October, leading to over 100 deaths and large-scale internal displacement. Local security forces were reportedly complicit in some of the violence. The Burmese military increased their presence in the area to ensure security, and the situation was calm by the end of the year. But communities remain segregated, and many Rohingya people have been unable to return to their former homes and livelihoods. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that some 115,000 people were displaced and are now living in and around camps and informal settlements. The UK has allocated £2 million to provide food, water and sanitation to 58,000 people affected.

The UK raised the marginalisation of the Rohingya community in Burma regularly in 2012. Our Ambassador has visited Rakhine State three times since June 2012. The Foreign Secretary discussed the situation in Rakhine State with Burmese Foreign Minister U Wunna

Maung Lwin at the UN General Assembly on 25 September. Mr Swire visited Rakhine State in December to see the plight of both communities and lobbied the Burmese government to maintain security, improve humanitarian access, bring those responsible to account and work towards a long-term solution, including on citizenship. We welcomed the formation of an independent Investigative Commission in August to explore the causes of the violence. We await the findings of the commission's report, due in March 2013.

The Burmese government has now signed initial ceasefire agreements with the Shan State Progressive Party, the United Wa State Army, the Mongla Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council, the Arakan Liberation Party, the New Mon State Party, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, the Chin National Front, the Karenni National Progressive Party and the Pa'O National Liberation Organisation. The UK supports the peace process directly, including by funding experts who have experience of inter-communal trust and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.

In Kachin State, conflict between the Kachin Independence Army and the Burmese military has continued. Since the onset of fighting following the ceasefire breakdown in June 2011, approximately 85,000 people have been displaced from their homes. Over half of these are in isolated areas close to the China border. A Human Rights Watch report in early 2012 detailed human rights abuses and contraventions of international humanitarian law. A further report indicated that the Chinese authorities have been forcibly returning Burmese citizens to Kachin State, an area of continuing conflict. We have raised the issue with the Chinese authorities in London and Beijing. The UK is contributing £3.5 million in humanitarian food aid for displaced civilians, including those in non-government-controlled areas. Following an upsurge in fighting in December, including air strikes by the Burmese military, Mr Swire issued a statement calling on the Burmese military to respect the stated wishes of the Burmese President and end hostilities, and for negotiations towards a ceasefire. He underlined the importance of normalising the role of the Burmese military by bringing them under the direct control of the government.

Freedom of religion or belief

Many of Burma's ethnic groups define themselves according to their ethnic and religious traditions, with significant Christian, Muslim and Hindu minorities. The UK is concerned by the apparent systematic destruction of mosques in Rakhine State during the recent violence, and by the destruction of places of worship in Kachin State during the ongoing conflict. We also note reports of continued restrictions on freedom of worship in Chin State, and look to the Burmese government to support freedom of religion as set out in the peace agreement with the Chin National Front. We have encouraged the Burmese government to invite the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion and Belief to visit Burma. The UK is supporting interfaith work in Burma through our project funding.

Women's rights

Burma ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1997. But women are under-represented in public life, and the World Bank's Gender Inequality Index places Burma 96 out of 146 countries. Many rural areas of Burma still see much unequal treatment based on gender. We backed projects supporting future women leaders in politics, civil society and business over the course of 2012.

Reports continue of the military using sexual violence against civilians in areas of ethnic conflict, including in Kachin and Rakhine States. We have provided legal advice, counselling and victim support services to victims of sexual and gender-based violence as part of the humanitarian assistance given to refugees and internally displaced persons. Mr Swire raised concerns over the use of sexual violence in conflict with the government.

Poor economic conditions in Burma have led to increased legal and illegal migration of men, women and children across East Asia and the Middle East, where they risk being subjected to forced labour and sex-trafficking. Women and girls, particularly from ethnic minority groups, are reported to be trafficked to neighbouring countries, in particular China and Thailand. The Burmese government launched an anti-trafficking website in February, and in March established a Human Trafficking Fund to provide support to victims of trafficking. After President Obama's visit to Burma in November, the US and Burma agreed to work on a joint anti-human-trafficking campaign.

Minority rights

Embedding minority rights is one of Burma's greatest challenges. An inclusive and credible process of national reconciliation is needed to address existing inequalities. State and divisional parliaments were established in March 2010 in accordance with the 2008 constitution. Several ethnic minority parties have substantial blocs of elected MPs within them. They have not, however, yet delivered the sort of regional authority that many ethnic groups would like.

Following the large displacements in the aftermath of the violence in Rakhine State, the Burmese government conducted a process of registration for the Rohingya community, but this has proved contentious. During his visit, Mr Swire was assured by senior officials that a board would be established to examine cases for citizenship. The UK Government believes that the citizenship status of the Rohingya needs to be resolved in order to bring about a long-term solution to the humanitarian challenges they face.

Children's rights

Both the Burmese military and many non-state armed ethnic groups have been implicated in the use of child soldiers over many years. Burma is listed by the UN Security Council as being in breach of international laws against the recruitment and use of child soldiers. In July, the UN and the Burmese government announced a joint action plan to eliminate the practice, and to bring to account those in the Burmese military found guilty of using children in armed conflict.

The UK Government is funding children's education in Burma. We are spending £10.5 million over four years to fund 120,000 children to go to primary school and 87,000 children to access early childhood and development services. We are also helping UNICEF distribute quality learning supplies to over one million children. We are also contributing to the government's Comprehensive Education Sector Review.

National Human Rights Commission

The Burmese National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was formed in 2011. In 2012, it issued a number of statements to draw attention to human rights abuses, including in Kachin

State. However, many in civil society remain sceptical of its independence and effectiveness. Legislation is being prepared, with international assistance, to give the NHRC a clear legal basis and mandate.

Foreign Secretary William Hague with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at a reception in London, 21 June 2012

China

Economic growth over the last three decades has helped to deliver substantial improvements to the social and economic rights of Chinese citizens. However, progress on core civil and political rights was limited in 2012.

A new Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee was appointed at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, marking the beginning of leadership transition. This period saw increased online censorship and harassment of human rights defenders.

Events in 2012 again highlighted the inadequacy of safeguards in China to guarantee the rule of law and access to justice. China did, however, continue to make legislative and judicial reforms, including a major revision of the Criminal Procedure Law, the passage of China's first ever Mental Health Law and the publication of the first ever White Paper on Judicial Reform. These developments indicate that there is interest in strengthening the rule of law, at least within parts of the Chinese system.

In June, the Chinese government issued its second National Human Rights Action Plan (2012–2015). This contained language about improving protection of civil and political rights, but lacked detailed benchmarks or implementation plans.

The UK Government's approach to human rights in China is one of constructive long-term engagement, to support modernisation and internal reform. We encourage China to lift the barriers that remain to its ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). We focus particularly on abolition of the death penalty, criminal justice reform, freedom of expression and the development of civil society.

In 2012, our approach was delivered through three main pillars: high-level lobbying and engagement, the bilateral human rights dialogue and financial support to projects in-country. We consistently raised human rights concerns directly with the Chinese leadership, both publicly and in private. We also increased our online diplomacy work, which promotes aspects of British society and values and raises awareness in China about international standards in human rights.

The UK–China Human Rights Dialogue

The 20th round of the UK–China Human Rights Dialogue was held in Nanjing in January 2012. Discussions included detainee rights, migrant rights, capital punishment, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, China's plans for ratification of the ICCPR, ethnic minority rights and individual cases. There were detailed expert discussions on the role of faith groups in civil society and the use of evidence in criminal trials.

The dialogue is an important channel for our concerns and supports the other pillars of our engagement, informing our lobbying and project work and helping to strengthen our working relationships with relevant ministries.

We continued to run a portfolio of projects worth around £600,000 in the 2012/2013 financial year. These enabled us to work directly with Chinese officials, academics and civil society to

address issues such as use of the death penalty, torture prevention, strengthening civil society and the protection of media freedoms.

Democracy and elections

According to its constitution, China is a multi-party socialist state under the guidance of the Communist Party of China (CPC). China's leaders have consistently rejected the prospect of a separation of powers, and China operates essentially as a single-party state. Direct elections take place only for village councils and local People's Congresses. Electoral lists are dominated by party members. The 18th Party Congress in November did not signal any movement towards representative democracy. The appointment of a new Politburo Standing Committee was announced in November. Its members will hold office for five years.

Freedom of expression and assembly

There are now more than 500 million Chinese Internet users and over 400 million members of domestic micro-blogging sites facilitating discussion of political issues and popular concerns. The popularity of such sites continues to grow.

The Chinese authorities continue to impose limits on freedom of expression, so that despite being protected under the constitution it is severely restricted in practice. Both online and in traditional media, content that is considered politically sensitive is subject to extensive censorship.

Access to many foreign websites is either permanently or periodically blocked. Restrictions on Internet access were further tightened around the period of the Party Congress.

Foreign journalists reportedly remain targets of harassment, intimidation and occasional physical violence. In May, al-Jazeera correspondent Melissa Chan was expelled from China. In July, a Japanese journalist was reportedly beaten by police while covering a demonstration in Nantong.

Journalists, bloggers and intellectuals continue to be harassed or detained for exercising their right to free speech. Many high-profile activists, including Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo, are serving long prison sentences for speaking out about political freedom and human rights. There were more such convictions in 2012, including those of writer Li Tie and Internet cafe manager Cao Haibo, sentenced to ten and eight years' imprisonment respectively for subversion.

Although freedom of association and assembly are also guaranteed by the constitution, in practice these rights are also severely limited. The party continues to control the only officially recognised trade union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. Collective bargaining and the right to strike are restricted both in law and in practice. On 1 January, new Regulations on Consultation and Mediation for Labour Disputes in Enterprises entered into force. The regulations were a positive step and should in time help to improve resolution of labour disputes, but their immediate effect has been limited.

Large-scale public protests continued in 2012, although reliable estimates of the number of such “mass incidents” are hard to obtain. They frequently centred on local issues, such as environmental issues. Protests over local grievances were often resolved through offers of concessions or public consultation, but protests criticising the party or touching on politically sensitive issues were swiftly put down.

The UK raised concerns about freedom of expression and association regularly in 2012 with the Chinese government, including at the Human Rights Dialogue and at the inaugural People to People Dialogue in April.

Human rights defenders

The use of unlawful and arbitrary measures to target human rights defenders continued during 2012. These included enforced disappearance, house arrest, restrictions on freedom of movement, communication and association, extrajudicial detention (including “re-education through labour” (RTL), “black jails” and involuntary psychiatric committal) and harassment of family members. Human rights defenders also continued to be subjected to criminal charges and procedurally flawed trials, often involving the poorly defined category of offences encompassing “endangering state security”. Diplomats and media were repeatedly refused access to their trials.

The situation of human rights defender Chen Guangcheng drew global attention following his 27 April escape from extra-legal house arrest. Chen sought refuge in the US Embassy in Beijing, before he and his immediate family were granted permission to leave China. They arrived in the USA on 20 May.

Liu Xia, wife of Liu Xiaobo, remained under house arrest. The extra-legal restrictions in place around her were highlighted in December, when journalists and activists briefly managed to reach her apartment. Diplomats, including British officials, attempted to visit Liu Xia during 2012 but were repeatedly denied access.

On 1 January, relatives of disappeared rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng received notification that he was being held in Shaya prison in Xinjiang. They were allowed to visit Gao on 24 March. It is unclear whether he has been permitted any visitors since then; lawyers appointed by his family were refused access to Gao in August.

Ethnic Mongolian rights activist Hada disappeared on release from prison in December 2010 and remained in arbitrary detention at unknown locations during 2012. In October, his family reported that he was suffering from symptoms of psychosis but was being denied access to psychiatric care.

The use of enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention to silence other human rights defenders, including activists Song Ze and Zhu Chengzhi, continued. Several, such as Shanghai academic Feng Zhenghu, spent prolonged periods under house arrest in 2012, while others, such as Sakharov Prize winner Hu Jia and environmental activist Sun Xiaodi, continued to be subjected to periodic harassment and restrictions on their personal freedom.

Some human rights defenders, including artist Ai Weiwei and poet Li Bifeng, were investigated for "economic crimes", charges which they claimed were politically motivated. Li was imprisoned for 12 years in November for contract fraud. In July, Ai's company, Fake Cultural Development Limited, lost its appeal against tax evasion penalties totalling around £1.5 million.

Several human rights defenders suffering from serious health conditions were denied access to adequate medical treatment during 2012. These included disabled rights lawyer Ni Yulan, sentenced to two years eight months' imprisonment in April for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" and fraud (later reduced to two years and two months on appeal). Ni was diagnosed with a thyroid tumour in October. Her family applied for medical parole but did not receive a response. Veteran rights activist Mao Hengfeng was similarly sentenced in November to 18 months' RTL, despite fragile health.

British ministers, including the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, continued to raise their concerns regarding individual human rights defenders, both publicly and privately, throughout 2012.

Access to justice and the rule of law

In March, the National People's Congress passed the first major revision for 15 years to China's Criminal Procedure Law. The judicial and public security authorities then began preparing for its implementation on 1 January 2013, training staff and drafting judicial interpretations to guide them in its application.

The law included a number of welcome steps in areas such as the exclusion of illegally obtained evidence, juvenile justice, the rights and role of defence lawyers and legal aid provision. Measures such as the establishment of a witness protection scheme increased the provision for witness testimony in trials, reducing reliance on confessions for obtaining convictions. The revision also included for the first time an acknowledgement that one of the objectives of the law was the protection and safeguarding of human rights.

But there were also some retrograde steps, particularly in respect of cases involving "endangering state security", terrorism or major corruption. In these circumstances lawyers will need permission from prosecutors to meet clients, with no avenue of appeal if permission is refused. The revised law also allows investigating authorities to place suspects in such cases under residential surveillance at a "designated place of residence" (that is other than their home) and to refrain from notifying their next of kin if they believe that doing so would impede the investigation. There was domestic and international concern that these changes would effectively legalise enforced disappearance.

In October, China published its first White Paper on Judicial Reform. This pledged to improve priority areas in the justice system, such as enhancing judicial capacity and improving protection of human rights. The paper demonstrated that the authorities acknowledge that further change is needed, but it lacked detail on implementation. We look forward to further information on the policies which will be put in place to effect these changes.

Broadly speaking, access to justice remains limited in China, and the rule of law is weak. There is no presumption of innocence. Although the constitution guarantees the independence of the courts, in practice the law is subordinate to the interests of the party and social stability. The party's Politics and Law Committees can intervene in court operations and give judges "guidance" on verdicts and sentencing in specific cases. Safeguards against judicial corruption are weak and poorly enforced.

Safeguards for the independence of the legal profession also remain weak. In March, the Ministry of Justice issued a requirement for new lawyers and those reapplying for licences to swear an oath including a profession of loyalty to the party. The past year also saw stricter enforcement of the requirement for law firms to establish party cells. The position of lawyers taking on politically sensitive cases, or those of human rights defenders, remained precarious.

The use of extrajudicial and extra-legal forms of detention persisted, including in "black jails", house arrest and involuntary psychiatric committal. Use of RTL, effectively a form of arbitrary detention, also remained widespread. Public security organs can order the administrative detention of an individual without trial for RTL for up to three years, with the possibility of up to a year's extension. Although RTL is meant to be used to punish minor offences, it is also used to silence petitioners, Falun Gong practitioners and human rights defenders. There continued to be reports of abuse, mistreatment and torture in RTL facilities.

Public controversy around an RTL sentence in August stimulated widespread debate about the need for reform of the system. Tang Hui, who had been petitioning for justice for her daughter following her abduction and rape, was sent for RTL for 18 months for "disturbing social order". Following an online outcry, she was released after eight days. A survey carried out by state media in the wake of her case found that 87% of those polled favoured the abolition of RTL. An open letter published by rights lawyers in August gained widespread attention with calls to limit the influence of the public security organs in the RTL system. In October, a senior government official said that there was now a consensus on the need for reform of RTL. Pilot RTL reforms are reportedly under way in several cities, although no further information about these was available in 2012.

Death penalty

In 2012, China almost certainly continued to execute the highest number of people in the world in absolute terms. There are still 55 capital offences on the statute books, including many non-violent crimes. The number of executions per year has reportedly halved since the Supreme People's Court took back the power of final review over death sentences in 2007, although the number of executions continues to be a state secret. Informed estimates currently place the figure at around 4,000–5,000 per year. The medical sector continues to rely on organs from executed prisoners for transplants, although the prisoner's prior consent is required. In March, the Ministry of Health pledged to end this practice within the next three to five years.

The March, revision of the Criminal Procedure Law included measures intended to strengthen oversight of the use of the death penalty. Supreme People's Court judges will

now be required to hear from defendants and their lawyers when reviewing death sentences, although it is not yet clear whether it will be feasible to do this in person in every case.

There was continued public debate on the death penalty in 2012, as in the case of female entrepreneur Wu Ying, sentenced to death in January for "illegal fundraising". Following an online outcry over the severity of the penalty, the Supreme People's Court overturned the sentence in May. However, while Chinese leaders have said that abolition is their ultimate goal, officials claim that a widespread public belief in retributive justice means that Chinese society is not yet ready for abolition. This remains a significant obstacle to China's ratification of the ICCPR.

Torture

Chinese law prohibits torture, physical abuse and the insulting of prisoners' dignity. However, there were widespread reports in 2012 of abuse, mistreatment and torture. Human rights defenders were particularly at risk. Reports detailed the use of methods of abuse and torture, including sleep deprivation, the use of stress positions, beatings and electric shocks.

The revised Criminal Procedure Law contains provisions which, properly enforced, could help to prevent torture and mistreatment. It codifies the Rules on the Preclusion of Illegally Obtained Evidence introduced in 2010. Police must transfer suspects to pre-trial detention centres within 24 hours of arrest and any successive interrogations must be carried out there. In the most serious cases, audio or video recording of interrogations is mandatory. Confessions will be inadmissible where there is reason to suspect they were extracted under duress. When defendants make an allegation of torture, police should appear in court to testify. The revised law also expands the interpretation of torture beyond the infliction of purely physical suffering.

The revised law seeks to limit the use of pre-trial detention and expand the use of bail and residential surveillance, which should help to reduce the risk of torture and mistreatment. However, the provisions on residential surveillance for cases involving "endangering state security", corruption and terrorism charges, could increase the risk of torture or mistreatment in such cases, as noted above.

Freedom of religion or belief

Freedom of religious belief is guaranteed by the constitution. However, the practice of religion remains restricted. There are five officially sanctioned religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism), governed by state bodies. Places of worship, institutes for religious education and clergy must be officially registered.

Due to restrictions on the number of registered places of worship and clergy, the official religions do not have sufficient capacity to serve the demands of China's growing numbers of religious believers, particularly Christians. This has led to a large growth in unofficial "house churches", which continue to face official harassment. A number of house church leaders were detained during 2012. Evangelising also continues to risk drawing a harsh response from the security forces. Christians Sun Yuefen and Ren Zhimin were reportedly sentenced to two years' RTL in September for "illegal evangelising" in Inner Mongolia.

Relations between the official Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and the Holy See remained difficult during 2012. Ma Deqin, a Catholic bishop in Shanghai, disappeared after publicly resigning from the CCPA at his ordination in July. He was subsequently stripped of his title as an Auxiliary Bishop by the state-sanctioned conference of Catholic bishops in December, and he has been accused of violating state regulations on the administration of religious affairs.

Restrictions on Tibetan Buddhist religious practices and clergy remained particularly tight. New regulations on the role of Democratic Management Committees strengthened official control over monastic communities. Restrictions on the religious practices of the Muslim Uighur minority in Xinjiang are also strict, and were intensified during Ramadan. Minors are not permitted to attend Koranic study classes or worship in mosques. Police raids on illegal Koranic schools in May and June reportedly resulted in a number of children being injured and several deaths. A number of Uighurs received heavy prison sentences during 2012 for crimes such as selling illegal religious publications and holding illegal religious meetings. The authorities continue to crack down on groups classed as "illegal cults", including Falun Gong and the breakaway doomsday Christian sect Eastern Lightning.

There were however some signs in 2012 that the space for faith-based civil society groups is expanding. In February, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) issued a non-binding opinion encouraging religious groups to engage in charitable activities. This would for the first time permit religious organisations to establish foundations, social service bodies and non-profit hospitals.

Women's rights

Whilst women's access to education and employment in China is generally good, the representation of women at senior levels of the party and government remained very low.

Gender-based violence remains a widespread problem. An anti-domestic violence law is now expected to be on the legislative agenda within the next two years. The UK supported the contributions of Chinese civil society groups to the debate over the drafting of the law through relevant project work.

The Chinese government continues to enforce family-planning policies, and has re-affirmed that it does not currently intend major reforms or abolition of these policies. There were continued reports of the illegal use of forced abortions and sterilisations in 2012. Online outrage erupted in June over the case of Feng Jianmei, who was forcibly subjected to a late-term abortion by local family-planning officials.

Although sex-selective abortion is illegal in China, reports suggest that the practice continues to be widespread, particularly in rural areas.

Refugees and asylum seekers

The forced return of refugees from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK): continued in 2012. The Chinese government refuses to recognise the status of refugees from the DPRK, categorising them as illegal economic migrants. The UK raised concerns about this at the March session of the Human Rights Council.

In August, around 1,000 Kachin refugees were returned to Burma from southern China. The UK raised concerns about this with the Chinese authorities.

There were further reports in 2012 of Uighurs and Tibetans being deported to China from neighbouring countries, with some subsequently receiving long prison sentences on charges such as inciting separatism.

Civil society

At the end of the year, there were around 460,000 registered NGOs in China, a growing number of fundraising foundations and up to three million unregistered NGOs. There is still no national legislation regulating NGOs and charities. A number of provinces and municipalities introduced regulations to improve registration for some types of NGO. Activists hope that these initial steps will lead to the passage of a long-awaited Charities Law. Some measures were introduced to improve the transparency and accountability of certain charitable foundations, but these remain a serious weakness across the sector.

The authorities introduced plans to contract out delivery of some social services to social welfare NGOs. However, in practice this is still dominated by government-organised NGOs, and few independent NGOs are able to participate.

The authorities have also announced plans to revise the regulations governing foreign NGOs. Despite their growth in number, both domestic and foreign NGOs continue to face extensive legislative, operational and policy barriers. NGOs involved in advocacy, legal aid or politically sensitive work frequently face particular difficulties and are regularly subjected to official harassment, interference and forced cancellation of their activities. There were reports of the suppression of labour NGOs in Shenzhen throughout the latter half of 2012.

Tibet

British officials were able to visit Tibetan areas in the provinces of Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai in 2012. They found evidence of high levels of participation in religious activity. Some Tibetans are benefiting from rapid economic development and official subsidies but tensions and the security presence in many Tibetan areas are high. The Chinese authorities refused to issue permits to officials from a number of embassies, including the UK, to visit the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

Disturbingly, incidents of self-immolation by Tibetans increased in 2012. The UK government received reports of 82 cases in mainland China in the course of the year. At least 69 appear to have resulted in the death of the individual concerned. The Chinese authorities detained a number of monks for inciting the immolations and distributing information about them. FCO Minister Hugo Swire issued a statement in relation to self-immolations calling for a resumption of dialogue to resolve underlying tensions and the situation in Tibet on 17 December. Similar statements were issued by, amongst others, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, on 2 November and the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Catherine Ashton, on 14 December.

In January, there were several clashes in Tibetan areas of Sichuan province between Tibetans and Chinese security forces, with the security forces using lethal force against protesters. This was widely condemned by the international community, including by former FCO Minister Jeremy Browne in January. In November, security forces reportedly beat Tibetan student protesters. Eight students were subsequently imprisoned in connection with the demonstrations.

For the second year in succession, there were no talks between the Chinese authorities and representatives of the Dalai Lama. This is the longest gap between talks over the past decade. The Tibetans' lead negotiators announced their resignation in May in protest. The UK continued to call in public and private for all parties to engage in substantive dialogue as a means to address Tibetan concerns and relieve tensions. We continued to press the Chinese authorities to exercise restraint, respect religious and cultural freedoms and allow unrestricted access to Tibetan areas for international journalists and diplomats. Tibet was discussed at the UK–China Human Rights Dialogue in January. The UK also raised Tibet, focusing on the rights of Tibetans to assemble peacefully, during the UN Human Rights Council on 20 June.

Xinjiang

In 2012, China continued to combine significant security spending in the Xinjiang autonomous region with high levels of investment. However, many of the minority Muslim Uighur population failed to benefit from the region's economic development, and there were reports of increasing restrictions on their cultural and religious freedoms. The demolition of traditional Uighur neighbourhoods in cities such as Kashgar, the confiscation of Uighurs' farmland for development projects and continuing resentment over the harsh treatment of Uighurs during previous outbreaks of ethnic unrest all contributed to continuing ethnic tensions in the region. There were periodic reports of outbreaks of ethnic violence, notably in Yecheng in February, when an attack by Uighurs on passers-by reportedly resulted in 16 deaths. Eight of the attackers were shot dead by police, and in March Abdukerim Mamut was sentenced to death for organising the attack. The authorities continued to respond forcefully to what they characterised as separatism, extremism and terrorism, although Uighur exile groups frequently disputed official reports of terrorist incidents. Three Uighurs accused of attempting to hijack a plane in July were sentenced to death in December, in what exile groups claimed was a flawed trial. Embassy officials visiting Xinjiang during 2012 observed a heavy security presence in many areas.

Hong Kong

The UK Government continues to take seriously its commitments under the Sino-British Joint Declaration. The latest of the FCO's six-monthly reports to Parliament on the implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" model concluded that after the handover, the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the joint declaration have in general been respected. The rule of law and the independence of the judiciary continue to be upheld. The report expressed concerns about restrictions on freedom of the press and of expression, however, and urged the new Chief Executive to ensure the full protection of the rights and freedoms, which are essential to Hong Kong's success.

Hong Kong has made gradual progress towards democratisation since 1997. In his foreword to the six-monthly report, the Foreign Secretary said that he looked forward to further substantive progress towards full universal and equal suffrage for elections in 2017 and 2020.

Colombia

In 2012, the government of Colombia made further progress in its efforts to address human rights problems in the country and maintained its commitment to “zero tolerance” of violations by state actors. Challenges remain regarding implementation of legal reforms and there continue to be instances of violence against human rights defenders, forced displacement, forced disappearances and killings of civilians. Organised illegal armed groups are responsible for the majority of such abuses, and most take place in areas affected by the ongoing armed conflict.

A key positive development in 2012 was the launch of peace discussions between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Talks are under way in Cuba, and the agenda recognises that the historic injustices suffered by vulnerable groups need to be addressed to bring about sustainable peace. The government also further developed the institutional framework for addressing these issues, creating agencies to implement the Land Restitution and Victims Reparations law and holding a national human rights conference.

The UK continues to monitor closely the capacity of the Colombian state to ensure that victims of human rights violations and abuses can access justice. Progress has been made on prosecutions for extrajudicial killings, but reforms to the military justice system could result in impunity for some members of the armed forces and police. Perpetrators of sexual violence and violence against human rights defenders rarely face justice, consistent with weaknesses in other parts of the justice system.

In 2012, our engagement with the Colombian government on human rights covered a range of issues including business and human rights, land restitution, access to justice, and sexual violence against women. We also supported civil society organisations and human rights defenders, through public statements and making representations on their behalf. Colombia has moved forward on all these issues, including the return of the first internally displaced people to their lands through its restitution programme. At a meeting hosted by the British Ambassador in September, the government established a steering group on business and human rights to develop state policy on this.

The principal challenges for the Colombian government in 2013 will be to resolve the armed conflict, tackle impunity, increase the implementation rate of the land restitution programme and finalise a national human rights policy. Supporting the peace process will be a key UK priority. We will also continue to engage with government efforts to reduce impunity and to provide justice for victims and to implement its land programme. We will continue to provide UK advice on developing a business and human rights strategy, particularly in the context of the EU–Andean Free Trade Agreement, which we expect to come into effect in 2013. We will support efforts to stop sexual violence against women and continue a regular programme of meetings with human rights defenders to strengthen the position of civil society within Colombia.

Elections

There were no national or local elections in 2012 but 12 one-off local elections for governors and mayors took place. These were well run and deemed generally free and fair. Civil society groups highlighted links between some office holders and illegal groups, and corruption within local authorities is an issue of ongoing concern. There are investigations in hand against 8 of the 32 governors elected last year. Two have been barred from office and one has been suspended while the investigations take place.

Freedom of expression and assembly

The government is developing a policy to protect freedom of expression and to prevent violations of journalists' rights. In 2012, the Ministry of Defence launched training for the armed forces on freedom of expression. But concerns remain over threats against journalists, particularly in the Caribbean region and Antioquia. The UK supported a project to provide an analysis of freedom of expression in Colombia for the government.

Laws guaranteeing the right to belong to a union are in place, though levels of unionisation are low at approximately 4% of the workforce. Unions have traditionally been stigmatised as guerrilla sympathisers, as have other members of the political left. To address these concerns the government began a programme in 2011, starting with the re-establishment of the Ministry of Labour. In 2012, it re-started the Inter-Institutional Commission for Human Rights (in which the unions, business groups and the government examine violence against unionists) and appointed 52 new labour inspectors. However, the unions have publicly accused the government of not fulfilling its commitments under the labour action plan.

Human rights defenders

Threats and violence against human rights defenders remain a problem, especially in isolated regions. According to government figures in those cases where the perpetrator was identified, the greatest number came from criminal bands. There have been high-profile threats and violence in particular against land restitution claimants, and the National Prosecutor's Office investigated seven assassinations of land claimants. NGOs also report threats against those raising concerns about business activities in rural areas. In a unique programme internationally, the National Protection Unit, which has a budget of £67 million, now provides protection to 10,083 Colombians. In 2012, approximately 1,300 trade unionists and 1,332 other human rights defenders received protection measures. As a response to violence against land restitution claimants, the government is now fast-tracking all land claimants requesting protection.

Figures provided by the Presidential Programme for Human Rights show a drop in killings of unionists in 2012 and no killings of journalists. But it stopped producing figures for leaders of community and social groups, of whom over 50 were killed in 2011 according to government figures. The NGO platform "We Are Defenders" noted that 37 human rights defenders were killed in 2012, compared to 49 in 2011, and that threats and instances of violence had risen by 12%. There were several high-profile assassinations and forced disappearances of human rights defenders, including Manuel Ruiz, a community leader from Curvaradó, and Hernán Henry Diaz, a leader of an agricultural trade union in Putumayo. There were also reports of threats and violent attacks against members of the Patriotic March movement in

2012. We raised several of these cases, including those of Carlos Lozano, Fredy Chate, Gerardo Martinez and Gustavo Londoño, with the Colombian government.

UK lobbying over impunity in cases of violence against human rights defenders contributed to a decision to establish a new unit in the Prosecutor's Office to investigate these crimes more systematically. The British Embassy supported a project with the Public Prosecutor's Office to establish regional working groups of human rights defenders and local civil servants to discuss threats and protection measures. Embassy officials have also visited lawyers' collectives, indigenous communities and victims' groups to express support for their work. The Embassy has made representations on the cases of a number of Colombians in prison pending trial, including Liliany Obando, unionist and human rights activist, who was released in March.

Access to justice and the rule of law

The effective application of the law and provision of justice is critical for the long-term resolution of human rights violations and abuses in Colombia. However, lack of capacity and resources in the judicial system remain. According to the Prosecutor-General's office, no convictions were made for threats against human rights defenders in 2012. No figures were available for convictions for assassinations of human rights defenders, including trade unionists.

Judicial delays are not limited to human rights cases, and affect most investigations. The Prosecutor-General is committed to reforming his office to increase efficiency and improve prosecutions of organised illegal groups. Threats and violence against human rights defenders will be a priority for the unit.

Prosecutions of the emblematic "false positives" cases (cases where civilians were killed and then presented as insurgents) continued in 2012. By November, a total of 192 sentences had been passed against 602 soldiers and policemen since 2009, up from 138 sentences at the end of 2011. Over 1,500 cases are still open, however. The UN and civil society groups have expressed concern that a recent reform of the constitution may see these cases transferred to the military system, potentially increasing the chances of the perpetrators escaping with impunity. The government has asserted that the reform will not do this and will improve the effectiveness of military justice. The Prosecutor-General has pledged that no cases of possible false positives will be transferred to the military system. We will continue to monitor the reform closely.

Conflict and protection of civilians

Civilians continue to be the most frequent victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. The Colombian government has had problems registering new cases of internally displaced persons this year, and it does not yet have figures for 2012. The UN and International Red Cross estimate that around 200,000 people were displaced in 2012, compared to government figures of over 300,000 per year for 2007–2010 and a peak of 450,000 in 2002. They also report 124 mass displacements of 10 or more families up to November, affecting a total of around 8,500 families. The government estimates there were 204 civilian anti-personnel mine victims and 73 victims of massacres up to July. These figures are all roughly similar to those in 2011.

The government has continued to provide support to civilian victims of the conflict, and the Land and Victims Law came into force on 1 January. The Victims Reparations Unit has received over one million claims and has provided reparations to some 130,000 people, including financial compensation. Over 400 cases have been sent by the Land Restitution Unit to specialised judges, and five judgments were passed in 2012. Fifteen families have returned to the land from which they were displaced in the Montes de Maria region. But the Congressional committee monitoring implementation of the law has identified a lack of institutional capacity in certain key entities involved in the process and a lack of commitment from some departments.

Security for claimants and those returning to their land is also a key concern, and the Embassy has funded the Organization of American States to conduct security risk analyses in potential restitution zones. Experts from HM Land Registry have also provided technical advice to the Agriculture Ministry on land registration issues.

Women's rights

In 2012, the high incidence of sexual violence against women in Colombia received an increased level of publicity. In June, Rosa Elvira Cely was raped and then killed in Bogotá's National Park, causing national outrage and mass demonstrations against the lack of awareness of the prevalence of sexual violence in Colombia and high levels of impunity. The National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science carried out 22,500 medical examinations of sexual crimes in 2011, and Colombia's Constitutional Court said in its Judicial Decision 092 in 2008 that "sexual violence against women is a common, widespread, systematic and invisible practice within the context of the armed conflict".

The government recognised this as a priority issue and in September launched a National Public Policy for Gender Equality, covering issues such as increased women's participation in political decisions and better services for survivors of sexual violence. The implementing legislation for this policy has not yet been passed. The Embassy is working with the Prosecutor-General's office to improve investigation procedures and increase awareness of the services available to survivors. In 2008, the Constitutional Court ordered the Prosecutor's Office to investigate 183 cases of sexual violence as a priority. Of these, it appears only nine have resulted in convictions, and some 140 are still in the initial pre-trial stages of investigation. However, there have been prosecutions, including of Rosa Elvira Cely's murderer, who was sentenced to 48 years in prison. Lieutenant Raúl Munoz was sentenced to 60 years in prison for the rape of two girls and the murder of one of the girls and her two brothers.

Minority rights

The effects of the armed conflict on indigenous groups, often located in the most conflict-prone areas of the country, and confrontation between these groups and the government continued to be a major challenge in 2012. In July, indigenous groups in the south-western department of Cauca criticised the government for failing to provide security and social investment in the region, and demolished a military base near the town of Toribío. The initial confrontation and the subsequent reinstatement of state troops were generally peaceful; but one indigenous man, Edwin Fabian Guetio Bastos, was killed near an army checkpoint. The Prosecutor's Office is investigating the death, and the government has launched a dialogue

with indigenous groups from the area to discuss agricultural and social investment in the region, the military presence and mining development.

Under Colombian law, indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups have extensive rights to be consulted before any new development is undertaken in their areas. The National Indigenous Organisation has raised concerns about the way these consultations take place, claiming that indigenous groups are often badly informed about proposed projects and subject to coercion. We received reports about problems in the consultation process regarding a proposed expansion of the British-owned Cerrejón mine. Embassy officials visited the communities in question and raised their concerns with Cerrejón.

Children's rights

Children in Colombia are significantly affected by the armed conflict, and in particular are vulnerable to recruitment by illegal armed groups. The UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict finalised its conclusions on Colombia in December, expressing concern at continuing violations and abuses of the rights of children, mainly by guerrilla groups. The Institute for Family Wellbeing has launched a programme to combat child recruitment in over 800 high-risk municipalities. The UK attended the UN and Colombian government discussions over the issue to help facilitate better cooperation.

Cuba

There were some encouraging improvements in the human rights situation in Cuba in 2012, although there remain significant areas of concern. The announcement of the lifting of travel restrictions represents a major advance for freedom of movement. The Cuban government's ongoing economic reform programme opened up further economic freedoms and provided greater space for debate on economic issues, while respect for social and cultural rights, including free universal access to healthcare and education, were maintained. Religious freedom and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights continued to follow a positive trajectory. However, the government continued to silence dissent and deny basic civil and political rights. Of particular concern was the continued use of politically motivated short-term detentions throughout the year. Media freedom and Internet access remain heavily restricted, and the judiciary is tightly controlled by the ruling Communist Party. There is one internationally recognised prisoner of conscience in Cuba.

Our aims in 2012 were to encourage further progress on political and economic freedoms, and we continued to engage with the Cuban government, human rights defenders, opposition activists and broader civil society (including the Catholic Church) to encourage positive change on human rights. The British Ambassador in Cuba has regularly raised human rights concerns with the Cuban authorities. Our Embassy met opposition figures within Havana and across the country and regularly monitored demonstrations. We played an active role in the EU, in Brussels, and Havana, arguing for a robust but constructive position on human rights.

In 2013, we will continue to promote progress on human rights with an active and balanced approach, both bilaterally and through the EU. We will maintain our engagement with key actors and continue to raise concerns with the Cuban government within the context of our wider political engagement. We will maintain a dialogue with opposition activists and continue to monitor peaceful opposition demonstrations. We expect that the government will continue to expand economic freedoms and tackle corruption. Greater freedom to travel should in principle allow more Cubans to work and study abroad and return with new ideas, knowledge and capital. But the Cuban government is likely to continue to restrict basic civil and political rights as it seeks to prevent public protest. Despite some positive signals from the Cuban leadership about media and judicial reform, any change is likely to be incremental.

Elections

Cuba is a one-party state governed by the Cuban Communist Party. The President is elected by the National Assembly. Local elections took place in autumn 2012 and successful candidates will elect delegates to the National Assembly in 2013. While Communist Party membership is not a legal requirement to stand, in practice prospective candidates need the approval of party representatives, and genuine opposition candidates could not participate.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly remained throughout 2012. Independent trade unions are not permitted and there is no legal right to strike. Short-term

detentions of those expressing anti-government views were increasingly used to intimidate activists and prevent them attending planned anti-government demonstrations, which are banned. The Havana-based human rights monitoring group Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation reported over 6,000 such detentions in 2012, compared with 4,000 in 2011. These figures are impossible to verify.

More encouragingly, in 2012, the space for debate and criticism of government policy in relation to economic and social issues continued to expand, partially reflecting President Raúl Castro's call at the Cuban Communist Party Conference on 28 January for more open debate and a more objective press. Intellectuals, artists and "accepted" non-governmental institutions have all been able to speak more openly. The Catholic Church hosted a conference with Cuban Americans and opposition activists in April to discuss the economic reforms. Some critical letters about government economic policy from members of the public have also been printed in state media. Nevertheless, media freedom remained heavily constrained. Cuba ranked 167 out of 179 in the Reporters Without Borders 2011–2012 World Press Freedom Index, while on World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, the Committee to Protect Journalists cited Cuba as the ninth most censored state in the world.

Access to the Internet remained tightly controlled. The National Statistics Office announced in June that Internet access had increased to 2.6 million users (23% of the population). However, this reflects access to a Cuban intranet consisting of email and select websites. A Freedom House report estimated real Internet penetration at 5%. The main obstacles to greater access are lack of Internet access points, the prohibitive cost ($8 an hour, while average wages are $20 a month) and strict control over who can have the Internet at home. Those with access relied on the black market. One obstacle was removed in 2012, however, when an expensive charge to receive telephone calls was lifted, further easing private communications.

Human rights defenders

The Cuban authorities continued to harass human rights defenders throughout 2012 with short-term detentions, house arrests, fines and threats. According to the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, over 1,000 opposition activists were arrested in March, many pre-emptively detained in connection with the Pope's visit. Human Rights Day on 10 December and the 24 July funeral of leading opposition activist Oswaldo Payá, who died in a car crash, also gave rise to spikes in the detention figures. Payá's contribution to improving human rights in Cuba was recognised in a statement by the former FCO Minister of State for Latin America, Jeremy Browne. Notable individual short-term detentions during 2012 included those of leading Cuban blogger Yoani Sanchez, Hablemos Press director Roberto de Jesus Guerra Perez and Antonio Rodriles, who runs a forum encouraging debate on social, cultural, economic and political issues.

By the end of 2012, one internationally recognised prisoner of conscience remained in custody in Cuba. Brothers Antonio Michel Lima Cruz and Marcos Máiquel Lima Cruz were detained on Christmas Day 2010 and charged with public disorder and insulting national symbols after listening to music criticising the lack of free expression in Cuba and dancing with the Cuban flag. They were sentenced to two and three years in prison respectively. Antonio was released on 24 October but Marcos remains in prison. Two other Amnesty

International prisoners of conscience, Yasmin Conyedo Riverón and Yusmani Rafael Álvarez Esmori, were released on bail on 5 April. Amnesty also adopted José Daniel Ferrer Garcia, Ivonne Malleza Galano, Ignacio Martínez Montejo and Isabel Haydee Álvarez as prisoners of conscience in 2012, but all have now been released.

Prominent activist group Damas de Blanco ("Ladies in White"), made up of female relatives of ex-political prisoners, were generally allowed to continue their regular marches in Havana on Sundays throughout 2012. They were, however, subjected to acts of intimidation on several occasions, including being surrounded by pro-government supporters chanting abusive slogans and being prevented from marching. Some were subjected to short periods of detention, others spent longer in custody. Niurka Luque Álvarez was detained on 17 March during a protest and released on 5 October pending trial. Sonia Garro Alfonso and her husband Ramón Alejandro Muñoz, who were arrested on 18 March, continue to be held without charge. A British Embassy official regularly observed planned marches and demonstrations throughout 2012.

Opposition activists continued to use short-term hunger strikes throughout 2012 as a means of protest against poor prison conditions or the detention of fellow activists. Some 30 opposition activists went on hunger strikes between 10 and 17 September to protest about opposition activist Jorge Vasquez Chaviano remaining in custody beyond the completion of his prison sentence. He was subsequently released. Hablemos Press journalist Calixto Martínez spent 33 days on hunger strike from 10 November in protest against prison conditions.

Access to justice and the rule of law

There remains a lack of judicial independence in Cuba. There is limited due process or scope for independent lawyers, and suspects are sometimes detained for months without being notified of the charges against them. Cubans trying to offer independent legal advice faced harassment from the security services. The Vice President of the Supreme Court announced plans to modernise Cuba's legal system in December.

During 2012, we continued to receive reports of poor prison and detention conditions. Opposition activists have complained about punishment cells, poor sanitation and insufficient food and water. A number of prisoners went on hunger strike over the past year in protest against prison conditions. Cuba maintains that its prisons meet UN standards. The authorities have not yet organised a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, despite having extended an invitation in 2009.

Death penalty

The Cuban government maintained its moratorium on the death penalty, last used in 2003. Capital punishment remains in Cuban law but there are no prisoners currently facing the death penalty. There have been no indications that Cuba will re-employ the death penalty in the near future. In December, Cuba abstained on the biennial UN resolution on a global moratorium.

Freedom of religion or belief

A climate of religious freedom and tolerance was maintained in Cuba throughout 2012. This was highlighted by the Pope's visit in late March, as large crowds turned out for masses held in Havana and Santiago with the support of the Cuban authorities, and Good Friday was designated a public holiday. The visit also reflected the expanding role of the Catholic Church in society, and its growing influence in politics, building on its work in 2010 and 2011 to mediate and facilitate the release of political prisoners. Other religious groups enjoy comparable levels of religious freedom and tolerance, with the ability to cultivate new members, hold religious activities, express religious views, and conduct charitable and community service projects. However, the Cuban government continued to detain opposition activists who used religious centres as platforms for gathering support or expressing political views.

Women's rights

The constitution guarantees women political, economic, social, cultural and family rights and opportunities equal to men. Respect for women's rights is generally observed in practice. Cuba ranked 19 out of 135 countries on the World Economic Forum's 2012 Global Gender Gap Index. This includes the strong participation of women in public life. According to the Inter Parliamentary Union, the Cuban parliament has the third-highest proportion (45%) of parliamentary seats held by women.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

There was progress on LGBT rights in 2012. Cuba held its second annual Gay Pride march to celebrate the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia on 17 May. The parade was endorsed by the government and led by President Castro's daughter, Mariela Castro. At the Communist Party National Conference in January, the government also officially recognised the need to address discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The National Centre for Sex Education, headed by Mariela Castro, continued to raise awareness of LGBT issues through educational campaigns.

Other issues

In October, in a major advance on freedom of movement, the Cuban government announced the lifting of travel restrictions on Cubans leaving and returning to the island, including the abolition of exit visa requirements, cheaper passports and an extension from 12 to 24 months of the time Cubans can remain outside the country without special permission. However, the new migration law, which came into force on 14 January 2013, will retain a few controls. An FCO spokesperson welcomed the new law in a statement on 17 October.

Raúl Castro's economic reform programme, agreed in April 2011, continued to be implemented throughout 2012, bringing increased economic opportunities and freedoms to ordinary Cubans. The expansion of categories for self-employment, the extension of private cooperatives beyond the agricultural sector and access to credit has allowed more Cubans to set up businesses, and in a wider range of sectors, in 2012. Meanwhile, greater flexibility for private businesses to employ workers offers the prospect of more jobs and higher wages than those traditionally paid through the state-controlled economy. The new tax system, means-tested benefits and the easing of foreign-currency controls should help reduce poverty and spur growth.

The Cuban government continued to tackle corruption in 2012, and a number of high-ranking Cubans and foreign business people were dismissed or given stringent jail terms. Low-level corruption is endemic. Many Cubans rely on the black market to subsidise their low state income.

Cubans also continue to benefit from good social provision, with Cuba ranking 51st on the latest UN Human Development Index. Universal access to Cuba's education and healthcare systems was maintained and in general the quality of teaching and care remained high.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

We have seen little improvement in the human rights situation in the DPRK in 2012. There continue to be reports of widespread and systematic human rights abuses, including the use of the death penalty and the arbitrary manipulation of the judicial system. Fundamental freedoms, including freedom of speech, remain severely curtailed. The continued use of political prison camps remains of particular concern. In his report to the UN General Assembly in September, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK highlighted that there continue to be an estimated 150,000–200,000 people in prison camps in the DPRK. Evidence from defectors and NGOs, collected over a number of years, suggests that severe human rights violations take place within the camps, including the use of forced labour, torture, starvation, sexual violence against women and executions for dissent. It is difficult to assess fully the extent of the human rights abuses because the DPRK government refuses to allow independent human rights observers access to the country. This includes the UN Special Rapporteur. Despite continued lobbying, the DPRK authorities have continued to insist that they will not cooperate with either the UN or the EU on human rights.

The World Food Programme assessment is that people in the DPRK remain chronically malnourished. A rise in the production of basic carbohydrates, rice and corn, was countered by falling production of protein, fats and other essentials for a healthy diet. The DPRK leader, Kim Jong Un, has been in power for over a year and has promised publicly to improve the living standards of people. The UK would welcome efforts by the DPRK to develop its economy, but we have not yet seen any concrete measures which would achieve this. Military spending remains a national priority. While at the same time as seeking international aid, the DPRK spent hundreds of millions of dollars on two satellite launches in April and December. It has also devoted significant resources to civic amenities such as amusement parks in Pyongyang, when it lacks the infrastructure to allow for effective food production or distribution in the rest of the country.

Throughout 2012, the UK continued to pursue a policy of critical engagement with the DPRK government. We have repeatedly raised our concerns about the most severe human rights abuses, including the use of political prison camps. We have also pressed for DPRK engagement with the UN, and particularly with the Special Rapporteur, on the human rights situation in their country. Human rights also remain a key focus of visits to the UK by DPRK officials sponsored by the British Embassy in Pyongyang. During a visit by officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September, we discussed the UK's approach to reporting for the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review, and the importance of transparency. We also arranged a visit by DPRK officials to a UK magistrates' court to facilitate understanding of the UK justice system. In November, we provided funding for training in the UK in English language and culture for DPRK junior government officials, including members of the Korean Workers' Party and the Ministry for People's Security. This included exposure to many aspects of the UK relevant to human rights, including the political system, the media and the judicial system.

The UK has continued to raise its concerns about the DPRK's human rights record in multilateral forums. We supported the annual resolution on the DPRK in the Human Rights

Council, which was passed unopposed for the first time. We also co-sponsored the annual General Assembly Resolution, which was also passed without a vote. The UK has been active in participating in debates on the UN Special Rapporteur's reports on the DPRK, and we have brought his reports to the attention of the DPRK government.

We have also undertaken work aimed at improving the lives of vulnerable groups in the DPRK. With assistance from the British Embassy in Pyongyang, the DPRK sent their first athlete to the Paralympic Games in London. We hope that this will help to raise awareness and improve the status and treatment of disabled people in the DPRK. We also supported two small-scale projects which improved the facilities in schools for disabled people. In February, the British Embassy in Pyongyang facilitated a visit by a DPRK delegation working with people with spinal injuries to the UK. The delegation has shared their learning from this training with others in the DPRK.

The British Embassy in Seoul also works towards improving the human rights of the DPRK defector community in the Republic of Korea through its "English for the Future" programme. By providing English-language training, internships and Chevening scholarships, the programme helps to tackle some of the barriers which prevent defectors from integrating successfully into Korean society. Given the lack of progress on the major human rights issues, we will continue to raise our concerns with the DPRK government at every opportunity. We will also continue to co-sponsor UN resolutions on the human rights situation in the DPRK until we see concrete improvements. In addition, the UK with the EU and Japan will propose to the Human Rights Council that the UN introduces a Commission of Inquiry to report on some of the worst human rights abuses in DPRK, including those in political prison camps. We will continue to press the DPRK on the importance of transparency and cooperation with the UN. Given the positive progress on disability issues, we will continue to work with the DPRK authorities on improving support for disabled people. We will continue to seek increased access by British diplomats to areas of the DPRK outside Pyongyang, so that we can increase our understanding of the human rights situation outside the capital. We will encourage the DPRK government to deliver on its promise to improve the living standards of all its people.

Elections

Kim Jong Un was formally announced as Supreme Leader of the DPRK within days of his father dying on 17 December 2011. This happened without any clear democratic process. It was not until April that he was formally elected by the Supreme People's Assembly. This suggests that the DPRK has no plans to change its policy of appointing hereditary, lifetime leaders. The Supreme People's Assembly is the only significant state organ that appears to be directly elected, although the selection of its members is far from democratic: only one candidate stands in each consistency and voting is not secret.

Freedom of expression, movement and assembly

There is little evidence of freedom of movement or assembly; and the general population is required to attend political gatherings in support of the DPRK leadership at regular intervals. The DPRK government maintains tight control over media, and access to foreign broadcasting is strictly limited. Reports suggest that people found accessing foreign media without authorisation are subject to punishment, including imprisonment.

Human rights defenders

The security apparatus is ubiquitous in the DPRK and we have no evidence that there are any human rights defenders in the country. Some people who have defected have provided first-hand accounts of the human rights abuses. A number now work with NGOs to campaign for the improvement of human rights in the DPRK.

Access to justice and the rule of law

The juridical system is not independent. The constitutional changes made in April confirmed that its prime function is to protect the existing, socialist, political system.

Death penalty

There are 22 crimes that are officially punishable by death, but which are ambiguously defined in law. The DPRK does not provide statistics on the use of the death penalty, but reports suggest that its use continues.

Torture

There is a substantial body of evidence from defectors that the DPRK government routinely uses torture in the criminal justice system. The DPRK denies this, but the volume of testimonials claiming that the practice continues is significant. The British Embassy in Seoul produced a Korean version of the Essex University *Human Rights Centre/Foreign and Commonwealth Office Torture Reporting Handbook* in March 2012. The handbook has been translated into many languages over the last 15 years, but this is the first time it has been produced in Korean. The Embassy will be working with NGOs in the Republic of Korea to make sure that the testimonies of defectors from the DPRK are properly documented and reported to the multilateral agencies.

Freedom of religion or belief

The DPRK has a small number of state-controlled churches and other places of worship, and reportedly 500 house churches. There are many reports, however, that people who are involved in religion outside these state-controlled organisations have been imprisoned for practising their beliefs.

Women's rights

Despite formal equality, there is evidence that the traditional subservient view of women is pervasive. Consistent reports suggest that sexual abuse and domestic violence is common. Conditions in the DPRK have also led thousands of women to cross the border into China illegally every year, where they are vulnerable to human-trafficking gangs and sexual exploitation.

The British Embassy in Seoul is currently funding a research project to assess the DPRK's implementation of its obligations in the area of women's rights, including women with disabilities and mothers of children with disabilities. This will contribute to the formulation of recommendations by the international community for the DPRK's next Universal Periodic Review in 2014 and to its review under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Discrimination against Women.

Minority rights

The DPRK authorities deny that lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people exist. There is consequently neither legal nor practical protection for their rights.

Children's rights

Children are formally entitled to free education and healthcare. In September, the DPRK extended the period of compulsory education from 11 to 12 years. Over the past year, however, children have been removed from school for a substantial amount of time to participate in national events, for example the annual (mass gymnastics and cultural) Arirang Festival. There is also evidence that children have been forced to participate in military drills and are used for child labour. Given the level of malnutrition and poor healthcare facilities in the DPRK, many children do not have the basic necessities to enjoy their economic and social rights.

The British Embassy in Pyongyang supported several small projects to improve nutrition for young children. These included one which supplied a secure source of soybean milk to young children, two which funded greenhouses to support food growth for childcare centres, and one which provided freezers to a fish production unit supplying 261 welfare facilities. All of these projects were aimed at improving the diet of children outside Pyongyang who suffer from a particularly poor diet.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

In 2012, the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was dominated by the conflict in the east of the country. DRC security forces and illegal armed groups continued to commit human rights violations and abuses against the country's civilian population. The human rights situation in areas such as North and South Kivu deteriorated throughout the year. As well as the conflict, underlying factors include lack of state authority, weak institutions, poor implementation of legislation and impunity from punishment of those guilty of abuses. Violations include arbitrary arrests, summary executions, torture and forced recruitment, including of children, by armed groups. Sexual violence remains widespread. The DRC authorities did take some positive steps to try to address the situation in 2012, including the adoption of a draft law on establishing a national human rights commission, and signature of an UN/DRC action plan on child soldiers, but much more needs to be done. Thomas Lubanga's conviction by the International Criminal Court (ICC) was a welcome development.

Our main human rights objectives for 2012 were to focus on the core issues that underlie the majority of human rights violations and abuses in DRC: conflict, impunity and the state's lack of capacity to address human rights issues. We pushed for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to fulfil its remit effectively and played an important role in the renewal of its mandate, which was extended until 30 June 2013. We worked to ensure that the mission continued to prioritise the protection of civilians. We also pressed the DRC government to bring the perpetrators of human rights violations to justice. Our Embassy in Kinshasa regularly raised concerns about human rights violations with the DRC government, including with the Minister for Justice and Human Rights in June.

The UK continued to call for the implementation of the International Criminal Court arrest warrants for Bosco Ntaganda, leader of the March 23 Movement (the M23), a rebel military group he launched after mutinying from the DRC Army in April. The Secretary of State for International Development raised this with President Kabila in April. The DRC government's focus has shifted to tackling the M23 as a whole and regaining control of part of eastern DRC where M23 and Ntaganda are now located.

In 2012, the International Criminal Court (ICC) delivered its verdict on the case of Thomas Lubanga, who was found guilty of recruiting and using child soldiers in the DRC and sentenced to 14 years imprisonment. In December, the second ever ICC verdict lead to an acquittal for Matthieu Ngudjolo-Chui. He had been charged with war crimes in the DRC in 2003.

The UK worked through the Department for International Development (DFID) in 2012 to strengthen the rule of law, support institutions and build democracy. We sought in particular to ensure that peaceful and credible provincial assembly elections took place. These have been delayed because of the debate on the future of the Independent National Electoral Commission. Some progress was made in December with the adoption of draft legislation by parliament to reform the commission. This legislation is now with the President for promulgation.

The current conflict has highlighted the urgent need for security sector reform. DFID is implementing a programme focused on community policing, one of the key principles of which is improving respect for human rights. As plans for security sector reform develop, we will work to ensure that respect for human rights and addressing impunity are at their core.

We will also continue to press the DRC government to bring the perpetrators of human rights violations to justice. The prevention of sexual violence will be a priority in 2013. We will work with the Justice and Gender ministries, the UN, NGOs and civil society groups to address this.

Elections

The disputed elections which took place in November 2011 continued to exercise an impact in the first three months of 2012, raising in particular concerns about freedom of expression (described in more detail below). In their final reports on the elections, both the **Carter Center** and the **EU Observation Mission** said that the results lacked credibility. In a number of meetings with the DRC government and opposition leaders, including President Kabila and Etienne Tshisekedi, leader of the main opposition party, the UK Ambassador raised concerns and called for all sides to reach a peaceful resolution. Since the elections, we have discussed reform of the Independent National Electoral Commission with the DRC government and with the opposition. We will continue to do this to ensure progress on reform and that the concerns around the 2011 elections are addressed and local and provincial elections take place in 2014.

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression remained an area of concern throughout 2012. In the post-election period in early 2012, the government banned a major demonstration by the Catholic Church, and the security forces used tear gas to disperse crowds. Three radio and two television stations also had their signals jammed. In December, the government suspended the broadcast in Kinshasa of UN-sponsored Radio Okapi, claiming that they had not complied with administrative requirements. The EU issued statements condemning both these incidents:
www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/congo_kinshasa/press_corner/all_news/news/2012/20120216_fr.htm
www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/congo_kinshasa/documents/news/20121204_fr.pdf

Human rights defenders

Following the murder of prominent human rights defender Floribert Chebeya in 2010, the EU continued to lobby for improvements in the trial and subsequent appeal. The trial resumed in 2012 and we are continuing to monitor developments. The EU called for the DRC government to ensure there was **justice**.

There was also a ban on a film by Thierry Michel examining the Chebeya case, and Mr Michel was refused entry to DRC. The ban on Mr Michel and his film has now been lifted. In 2012, the EU issued statements on the Chebeya trial.

Access to justice and the rule of law

The judicial system lacks resources, independence and capacity. Corruption permeates all levels. Few cases reach court and impunity for the perpetrators of human rights crimes remains a serious problem. There was progress, however, in the reform of the national police and there were some small positive steps in 2012 in combating impunity. With MONUSCO support, judicial inspections and mobile court hearings took place to help deal with backlogs, and juridical authorities opened investigations into human rights violations committed by DRC Army officers. In 2012, the British Embassy at Kinshasa agreed funding to MONUSCO in support of their Military Criminal Law Programme and the Prosecution Support Cells (PSC) within that. The PSC are mainly based in the east of DRC. They were established to provide advice, monitoring, on-the-job training and logistical support to the Congolese military police investigators and magistrates.

Death penalty

The DRC retains the death penalty and military courts still hand down the death sentence, although there has been a moratorium on carrying it out since 2003. A bill to abolish the death penalty was rejected by the Congolese National Assembly in November 2010. We continue to lobby, with EU partners, for abolition, but it is unlikely that any progress will be made towards this while the country remains in conflict.

Torture

We welcomed the adoption in July 2011 of the law criminalising torture. In 2012, the Congolese Vice Minister of Justice undertook joint visits with MONUSCO to several parts of the DRC to conduct awareness-raising of the law by explaining the content and application of the law to provincial governors, magistrates and civil society. We remain concerned by anecdotal reporting of the security forces using torture, however, and have encouraged further work by the government to ensure full implementation of the law.

Conflict and protection of civilians

Civilians have suffered the impact of the renewed conflict in the east. The M23 militia's assault on Goma in November displaced an additional 140,000 people in and around the town. There were 2.4 million internally displaced persons across the country at the end of 2012, up from 1.7 million at the end of 2011; 420,000 people have fled into neighbouring countries. Many are living in squalid conditions and are vulnerable to human rights abuses and violence. The UK is a major humanitarian donor to DRC. DFID provided £18 million in humanitarian support in response to the crisis in eastern DRC. This is in addition to the £135 million package of humanitarian funding in the DRC over the next five years, supporting the 2.1 million emergency interventions each year.

In May, the DRC Army human rights code of conduct was launched. This was part-funded by the UK. It is aimed at improving discipline in the army and reducing the number of human rights abuses committed by Congolese soldiers against civilians. The UK has also provided funding to MONUSCO to establish a scheme under which expert prosecutors from around the world will mentor prosecutors and judges in eastern DRC on tackling impunity.

We worked hard in 2012 to achieve strong UN Security Council resolutions on the situation in DRC. UNSCR 2076 and 2078 (which renewed the UN sanctions regime) both called for

all perpetrators, including individuals responsible for violence against children and acts of sexual violence, to be apprehended, brought to justice and held accountable for violations of applicable international law. In November, the UN Sanctions Committee, of which the UK is a member, imposed sanctions on three leaders of M23. On 31 December, two further leaders were added to the list, as well as the M23 as a group and the militia group Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR).

Women's rights

Women and girls in DRC face extremely high levels of sexual violence, including rape and domestic abuse. They also suffer widespread disempowerment, lack of access to education, reduced political participation and severe poverty. The UK has continued to support programmes to improve women's rights and address issues including sexual and gender-based violence. The DRC is a priority country for the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, which will consider what further action can be undertaken to support national and international efforts to tackle sexual violence. The second review of the UK's National Action Plan to address women's peace and security in the DRC is available online.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

Culturally, homosexuality is not widely accepted in the DRC. A draft law which would criminalise homosexuality was introduced in parliament in 2010. The bill made no progress in 2012. We continue to monitor this and will lobby strongly against the bill should it make any progress.

Children's rights

Poor infrastructure and high levels of poverty mean that children in the DRC face serious challenges, including lack of access to education and healthcare. DFID continues to address the needs of children through a variety of programmes, including provision of healthcare and supporting development of infrastructure and schools.

The recruitment and use of child soldiers by illegal militia groups and the presence of child soldiers in the Congolese army remains a problem. The UN and DRC government signed an Action Plan on 4 October to end the recruitment of children into the Congolese armed forces and security services.

Eritrea

The Eritrean government took no concrete steps in 2012 to improve its poor human rights record, including on key issues such as religious freedom, freedom of the media, freedom of expression and assembly, arbitrary and inhumane detention and prolonged national service, despite showing more willingness to engage with the international community on issues including human rights. The government reiterated Eritrea's commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, but cited the continued state of "no war, no peace" with Ethiopia as the major obstacle to progress and to Eritrea's development in general.

Bilaterally in London and Asmara, and as part of the EU, we made clear in 2012 that we were looking for Eritrea to make progress on meeting its international obligations. Our Ambassador raised human rights when she met President Isaias in October, and FCO Minister Mark Simmonds did the same when he met the Eritrean Presidential Adviser in New York in September in the margins of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). The EU held a dedicated session with the Eritrean government at the end of 2012 covering the full range of issues, including democratic freedoms, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion, arbitrary imprisonment, civil society/NGOs and economic, social and cultural rights. We also drew attention to our serious concerns about human rights in Eritrea in separate statements in June and September at meetings of the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council. The UK supported UN Human Rights Council resolution 20/20, adopted by consensus on 6 July, which strongly condemned human rights abuses in Eritrea and created a Special Rapporteur for Eritrea. But the Special Rapporteur appointed, Sheila Keetharuth, has so far been denied access by the government and is having to fulfil her mandate from outside the country. We have urged the Eritrean government to allow her to visit the country, work with her and treat her appointment as an opportunity to make progress. Similarly, we have urged Eritrea to strengthen cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights more generally, including by allowing visits by the thematic Special Rapporteurs. Eritrea currently has five outstanding requests.

Eritrea accepted a substantial number of recommendations made by the 2009 Universal Periodic Review but has not implemented them. Along with EU partners in Asmara, the UK has urged the Eritrean government to meet its Universal Periodic Review commitments and stressed that we are ready to support the implementation process.

The UK's priorities in Eritrea are to support improvements to freedom of expression, freedom of religion and the rule of law, with the ultimate objective being the implementation by the government of a national human rights strategy. During 2013, we will continue to raise human rights issues with the Eritrean government, both bilaterally and through the EU. We will encourage the government to strengthen engagement with the international community and to translate this into tangible progress. We will urge the government to work constructively with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant Special Rapporteurs. We will give particular priority to encouraging and helping Eritrea to implement those Universal Periodic Review recommendations that it has accepted. We will encourage and support the rapid implementation of the reinstated UN and EU development assistance programmes, as well as encouraging Eritrea to accept further assistance, including in human rights areas. We will follow up discussions we have had with the government on human

trafficking and offer to provide practical support to Eritrea's anti-human-trafficking and victim protection efforts. We will continue to stress the link between improving human rights and the achievement of Eritrea's development goals.

Elections

Eritrea is a one-party state. The Eritrean constitution ratified in 1997 provides for an elected National Assembly. The constitution has not formally been implemented, although it is used as the basis for legislation. There have been no national elections since independence in 1993. Regional elections which should have taken place in 2009 have yet to be held.

Freedom of expression and assembly

The Eritrean state controls all media outlets. Only officially approved views are heard. There are no independent journalists. Speaking out against the government of Eritrea can lead to detention. The Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Barometer for 2012 reports that there are at least 28 journalists in prison, held without trial or access to a lawyer. Eritrea is ranked last out of 179 countries in the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index for 2011–2012. Assembly during religious festivals and national celebrations is tightly policed. Unlawful assembly is not tolerated.

September 2012 marked the eleventh anniversary of the detention without trial of a group of 11 Eritrean members of parliament (the G-11) and 10 journalists who had called for democratic reform. The UK supported a statement by the EU High Representative issued on this anniversary. We regularly raise these cases with the Eritrean government, as well as those of others detained since without trial. The UK has discussed reports of the deteriorating health of Petros Solomon, one of the G-11, with human rights activists in London, and has lobbied in Asmara, bilaterally and through the EU. In August, our Ambassador, with EU counterparts, raised our concerns about reports that only four journalists detained in September 2001 were still alive.

Access to justice and the rule of law

The judicial system in Eritrea is opaque, often arbitrary and harsh. The independence of the judiciary is limited. When trials do occur they are conducted in secret, often in special courts where judges also serve as prosecutors, and the accused have no access to defence counsel. For the most part those detained are not brought to trial. The government does not allow access to most of its prisons and there are no accurate figures on the number of prisoners. The number of those in detention on political and religious grounds could be in the tens of thousands. The Eritrean government has ignored frequent calls for political and religious prisoners to be brought to justice or released and refuses to give details of their whereabouts and fate, citing national security. Eritrea continues to hold a number of Djiboutian Prisoners of War, captured during the 2008 border conflict, without access to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Torture and detention conditions

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has been asking to visit Eritrea since 2005. Since 2009, the government has not responded to any written requests for information or to the outstanding visit requests. In his March 2011 report, the Special Rapporteur expressed concern about the well-being of a number of named individuals and said that the conditions

of their detention amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment. As the Eritreans do not allow access by family members or human rights organisations to prisoners, we are reliant on reports from those escaping detention or from prison guards who have left the country for evidence of torture and inhumane treatment. There are unconfirmed reports that many detainees have died in captivity.

Death penalty

There were no reports of the death penalty being used in 2012. In November, the British Ambassador joined the EU Ambassador in lobbying the Eritrean government to support the draft UN General Assembly resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

Conflict and protection of civilians

As of January, there were 4,726 refugees and asylum seekers in Eritrea, mainly Somalis, Sudanese and Ethiopians. The government of Eritrea continues to work with the UN High Commission for Refugees to ensure adequate provision of education and healthcare. The Eritrean government does not operate a system of forced repatriations but works with the UN High Commission for Refugees to return to their country of origin those who express a desire to go home. It cooperates on arrangements for the departure of those offered settlement in third countries (to date, some 165 refugees).

Freedom of religion or belief

Only members of the four traditional religions (Orthodox Christian, Sunni Muslim, Catholic and the Lutheran Evangelical Church of Eritrea) are allowed to worship in Eritrea. It is reported that there are a large number of detainees from non-state-sanctioned religions, including 56 Jehovah's Witnesses. The UK and EU counterparts have collectively called on the Eritrean government to release all prisoners detained for religious beliefs, or for them at least to be brought before a court for a public hearing and fair trial.

Women's rights

The position of women is comparatively well protected by the constitution, but implementation of women's rights is hampered by cultural attitudes and lack of capacity. Female genital mutilation is illegal but widespread. Allegations of sexual abuse of women during national service are common. The Eritrean government has implemented programmes to support the mainly female heads of households in rural communities, improving their access to water and sanitation and livelihoods. DFID continues to fund programmes run by UNICEF providing water and sanitation and a supplementary feeding programme for women in rural communities.

Children's rights

Children's rights are comparatively well protected in law but implementation is hampered by cultural attitudes and lack of capacity. Child labour below the age of 14 is illegal but in practice common. There is a shortage of schools and teachers at all levels. The Eritrean government has continued to build new schools and expand education to rural and nomadic communities, working in partnership with UNICEF.

Military service

Obligatory and indefinite national service continues to be a major driver for illegal migration. In 2011, the government ordered that the maximum 18-month term of national service be adhered to and that conscripts be allowed to complete their period of service in their own districts, allowing access to families. We are not yet able to assess whether this is happening in practice. There has been no change for those who have already been on extended national service – in some cases in excess of ten years. Conscripts are often required to perform non-military activities such as harvesting and construction work for the government and state-owned companies, which may amount to forced labour. There are reports that military officials have used conscripts to perform personal tasks.

Migration and human trafficking

The prolonged national service obligation coupled with poor economic conditions continue to fuel illegal migration, especially of the young. UNHCR registers around 3,000 Eritrean refugees every month. The true migration figure is likely to be much higher, as many migrants do not register. Illegal migrants are at risk of abuse at the hands of human traffickers; kidnapping, torture and the trafficking of body parts are among the allegations of abuse that have been made. There have also been allegations that some Eritrean officials, including those in the military, are themselves involved in human trafficking. There is no proof of systematic government involvement. The government of Eritrea denies allegations that it operates a "shoot to kill" policy along its border against Eritreans seeking to leave the country illegally. Concerns arose during the year about the trafficking of Eritreans through the Sinai and across the Mediterranean. FCO officials in London and the British Ambassador in Asmara have held constructive discussions with Eritrean officials, representatives of the Diaspora and UNHCR.

Human rights defenders

No active human rights NGOs or groups operate in Eritrea. The government of Eritrea does not permit human rights groups to visit the country. Civil society is tightly controlled, with no effective fully independent civil society groups.

Minority rights

Of the nine official ethnic groups in Eritrea, the Tigrigna dominates politically and culturally. The other groups complain of discrimination and violation of their rights. Relations between the government and the Kunama and Afar in particular are tense, with reports of skirmishes along the border with Ethiopia between Afar opposition groups and government troops.

Freedom of movement

Restrictions on travel for diplomats noticeably eased in 2012, although travel permits continued to be frequently denied. Restrictions for Eritreans on holding a passport or travelling outside the country remain in place.

Development assistance

We welcomed Eritrea's decision in mid-2012 to reinstate international development programmes. The British Ambassador in Asmara and officials from DFID were able to visit projects run by UNICEF in Eritrea. They agreed that these are making real impact and

represent good value for money. The UN assesses that Eritrea is one of the few countries in Africa making steady progress towards achieving the health-related Millennium Development Goals on the reduction of child and maternal mortality and combating HIV/AIDS. It is also making progress on environmental sustainability. However, much remains to be done, especially with regard to goals on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and attainment of universal primary education. DFID has continued to support UNICEF programmes in the areas of water, sanitation and nutrition with a grant for 2011–2012 of £5 million. The British Embassy in Asmara supported a food security programme operated by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and is currently supporting a further programme in this area.

Fiji

The human rights situation in Fiji has remained poor, despite steps taken by the interim government, notably on restoring democracy, which initially gave the appearance of progress. By the end of the year, 80% of those eligible had been registered to vote in elections scheduled for 2014. With UK support a Constitution Commission conducted widespread public consultations, delivering the first draft of a new constitution in December but this was subsequently rejected by the interim government in early 2013. The lifting of the Public Emergency Regulations at the beginning of 2012 was also briefly a cause for some optimism. However, this set of highly restrictive measures was immediately replaced with an amended Public Order Decree, which gave continuing powers to the interim government to restrict the right of public assembly and freedom of expression, and extended additional powers of detention to the military.

Little changed with regard to other human rights. Media freedom remains severely limited. Although government censors have been removed from newsrooms, the application of a range of punitive measures means that self-censorship now prevails. The judiciary remains compromised. Those who criticise the government continue to face harassment and intimidation. Women are under-represented at all levels of society and face high levels of violence. Fiji's record on workers' rights is one of the worst in the world. In the latter part of 2012, there was a spate of allegations about police and military brutality, including the use of torture.

The UK's main objectives for 2012 were the lifting of the Public Emergency Regulations, greater respect for women's rights and progress towards the re-establishment of democracy. Women's rights remain a major concern.

The coming year will be another crucial period for Fiji. Voter registration will continue, and a new decree setting out the rules for the registration of political parties is expected. This is likely to have considerable repercussions for Fiji's established opposition parties and their ability to participate in national elections. We will support ongoing action to prepare the country for a return to democracy. We will continue to engage with the interim government on human rights – specifically on the issues of torture and mistreatment in custody, raising individual cases where necessary. We will seek recognition and protection of women's rights and the easing of measures that inhibit freedom of expression, especially within the media. Targeted use of project funds and coordinated action, in particular with the EU and UN, will help us to make progress against these goals.

Elections

Fiji has been without a democratically elected government since the last military coup in 2006. It is the interim government's stated aim to hold national elections again by September 2014. In April, at the invitation of the interim government, a UN Needs Assessment Mission visited Fiji to evaluate technical requirements and provide advice. In July, the Elections Office commenced a nationwide campaign of electronic voter registration. By the end of the year, over 500,000 people, representing 80% of the country's eligible voter population, had been registered at centres across the country.

Another step in the process to restore democracy initially appeared to have been taken with the completion of a first draft of a new constitution. A five-member Constitution Commission, including three women, was appointed by the interim government in May. Under the chairmanship of Professor Yash Ghai, an internationally respected constitutional expert, the commission delivered a draft in December, despite reported interference from the interim government. It followed extensive public consultations, in which over 7,000 submissions were received. The British High Commission provided financial assistance to the Constitution Commission to support public consultations in some of the country's remotest provinces, including several outlying island groups. (The interim government rejected the draft in early 2013, however, saying it would produce a new draft to be reviewed by a Constituent Assembly selected by the Prime Minister and delivered in March 2013.)

The UK strongly supports a return to full parliamentary democracy in Fiji through credible, transparent and inclusive elections. However, for this to happen it is essential that the public is properly educated about their democratic rights. The FCO funded a project with the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, which has helped to increase awareness of electoral reform and the importance of participation, particularly among women, the young and other marginalised groups. The project achieved some notable successes. Monitoring at 31 of the 71 locations where the Constitution Commission received oral submissions indicated that 39% of submissions were from women; 831 written submissions (11% of the total) were made with the assistance of the project.

The UK was also instrumental in securing additional funding from the EU's Instrument for Stability.

Freedom of expression and assembly

There are severe limitations on freedom of expression in Fiji. Despite the lifting of the Public Emergency Regulations, the interim government remains highly sensitive to criticism. Although government censors have disappeared from newsrooms, a range of measures have been deployed to ensure that anti-government messages are not disseminated. The threat of heavy penalties, including large fines and prison sentences, for those in breach of the Media Decree has caused most media outlets to self-censor. Through the issuing of short licences, which can be revoked without warning, broadcasting companies have been kept under tight control. More persistent and vocal opponents have been silenced by the interim government through direct threats and warnings carried on the front pages of newspapers. The result is an intimidating environment in which few feel able to speak up.

Two cases illustrate how contempt of judicial process has been used to suppress freedom of expression. The Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF), a prominent civil society organisation, and the *Fiji Times* both faced charges for publishing statements by third parties criticising the judiciary. In the case against the *Times*, the Solicitor General has called for the High Court to impose the maximum fine and a six-month jail term for the editor, Fred Wesley. At the end of 2012, Mr Wesley had still not been sentenced. The High Commission observed the preliminary hearing in the CCF case and will continue to monitor proceedings in 2013.

In a more encouraging sign, the relaxation of requirements to obtain meeting permits for the purpose of discussing the constitution helped to foster a more open and participatory public dialogue. Certain groups, including the Methodist Church and political parties, were able to meet legally (with some restrictions) for the first time in several years. But there have been reports of arbitrary disruptions of other meetings. In July, 14 members of the Fiji Labour Party were arrested and taken in for questioning for holding a meeting without a permit. Trade unions have faced similar unannounced interruptions of their meetings.

Access to justice and the rule of law

The absence of an independent judiciary and the inability of citizens to challenge the decisions of government are matters of serious concern. Since the abrogation of Fiji's previous constitution in 2009, law-making has taken the form of presidential decree. Decrees are often passed into law at short notice and without any form of public debate or scrutiny. All decrees are absolute and un-appealable. The Administration of Justice Decree (2009) prevents legal challenges against any decree promulgated since December 2006. In 2012, the State Proceedings Decree further reduced the legal accountability of government officials and civil servants by granting them immunity against prosecution relating to any public statements made in either a professional or a personal capacity.

In January, the Law Society Charity (UK) published a report entitled "Fiji: the rule of law lost", which concluded that rule of law no longer operates in Fiji. The report cited serious concerns about the independence of the judiciary, the competence and independence of the prosecution service, restrictions placed upon the legal profession, the absence of democracy and the inability of citizens to challenge the decisions of government. Allegations made by two former judges give credence to the report's findings. In September, a previous Fiji Court of Appeal judge, Justice William Marshall QC, claimed interference in the conduct of cases by the Attorney General. In November, Greg Bullard became Fiji's shortest-serving resident magistrate, being dismissed, with no reason given, after six weeks in the post. Mr Bullard reported being unlawfully arrested and detained at Nadi airport before being deported to Australia. He stated afterwards that the judiciary, the legal profession and the Independent Legal Services Commission (ILSC) in Fiji are all controlled directly or indirectly by the Chief Justice.

In August, Laisenia Qarase, former Prime Minister and leader of the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) party, was sentenced to one year in prison after being found guilty by the High Court on abuse of office charges. The offences on which he was convicted took place over 20 years ago, prompting claims that the case was politically motivated. Mr Qarase's government was overthrown by the current regime in the coup of 2006. The conviction prevents Mr Qarase from contesting the 2014 elections. Mahendra Chaudhry, the Fiji Labour Party leader, faces criminal charges relating to alleged tax violations.

Death penalty

The death penalty is abolished for all civilian crimes, but remains in place for certain offences against the Military Code. No executions have been carried out in Fiji since independence in 1970. In December, Fiji abstained on a vote in the UN General Assembly calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

Torture

The mistreatment of detainees, including the use of torture, is a matter of serious concern. Fiji is not party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which prohibits the use of torture, or to the Convention against Torture.

During 2012, the number of reported cases of police and military brutality increased. In some instances, violence and humiliation has been used as a form of punishment for offenders. The following case is illustrative of the problem and the interim government's failure to address it. In September, five men escaped from a Suva prison. They were held responsible for a string of violent robberies in the capital. The military was drafted in to help recapture them. Reliable reports indicate that each of the men was badly beaten and tortured on being re-detained. The injuries they sustained were so severe that none of the men could be presented in court for several weeks while they were being treated in hospital. The last prisoner to appear, Epeli Qaraniqio, spent nearly two months in hospital. During this time his right leg was amputated when an open fracture became infected. The High Commission observed the court hearings for the men. We have also raised the case directly with the interim government, calling for a full investigation and the publication of results. The interim government promised to investigate but by the end of the year no investigation had yet been instigated.

Women's rights

The suppression of women's rights is a serious and ongoing concern. Extreme inequalities of gender persist in Fiji. Deeply entrenched negative societal attitudes towards women and a lack of adequate government protection are the main barriers to progress. Rates of violence against women continue to be some of the highest recorded anywhere in the world. Access to justice, particularly in cases of domestic violence, is poor. Women are also significantly under-represented at all levels of decision-making and are largely excluded from the formal economy and the political arena.

Figures from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre indicate that 80% of women in Fiji have witnessed some form of violence in the home, 66% have been physically abused by partners and nearly half repeatedly abused, 26% have been beaten while pregnant and 13% have been raped.

Despite the "no-drop" policy of police in cases of domestic violence, few cases go to court. Those that do often result in short sentences or the case being dropped in favour of private mediation. The police response to reports of abuse is often unhelpful, or in some cases harmful. In a stark example this year, a Fijian woman was granted asylum in New Zealand after suffering years of domestic violence ignored by police. The tribunal stated that there had been "a systemic failure by the Fijian police to provide consistent and effective protection for victims of family violence".

To mark the international 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign, the High Commission broadcast a series of awareness messages. These aired on five national radio stations, in the three local languages, for 16 days.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

In May, police cancelled at the last minute a march in Suva to mark the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, citing safety concerns. The march would have been the first of its kind in Fiji. The cancellation followed a public statement by the Methodist Church against rights for homosexuals. Police told the organisers that initially officers had not realised that it was a march for gay rights. The High Commission published a joint statement with the EU expressing dismay at the cancellation.

Workers' rights

There were continued incursions in 2012 on workers' rights, leading to further complaints by the trade unions which the interim government has failed to address. In September, an International Labour Organization (ILO) Contact Mission was expelled from Fiji following a dispute over its terms of reference (its original mandate was to examine complaints made by local trade unions about the lack of freedom of association). The High Commission issued a joint statement with the EU expressing regret at the aborted mission, which also drew strong condemnation from the ILO Director General. The ILO Committee on Freedom of Association subsequently included Fiji in a list of five countries (of 32 examined) with the worst records on employers' and trade unions' rights. It urged the interim government to undertake prompt and independent investigations into allegations of physical assault, harassment and intimidation of trade union leaders and members and to permit the return of the Contact Mission. In November, the interim government invited the Contact Mission to return to Fiji in 2013.

Iran

The human rights situation in Iran remained extremely poor in 2012. The government heavily suppressed freedom of speech, using intimidation and arbitrary arrest as tools of oppression and control. Senior opposition leaders remained under house arrest after almost two years of detention. Some minority groups described systematic repression of their communities and targeted intimidation of those speaking out against human rights violations. Several prominent human rights defenders remained in prison – some alleging torture and others suffering serious health issues for which they were denied adequate medical treatment. The death penalty was again widely applied, particularly for drugs offences, and in many cases in contravention of international law. The majority of the recommendations in the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review for Iran in 2010 remained unimplemented.

The UK played a prominent role in increasing international pressure on the Iranian regime to improve its record. We supported the successful renewal in March of Dr Ahmed Shaheed's mandate as United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran. In March, we supported further additions to the EU human rights sanctions list of Iranians responsible for grave human rights violations, which now includes 77 individuals. The measures also introduced a prohibition on the sale and export to Iran of equipment that could be used for internal repression or Internet censorship. We helped to raise the profile of several serious human rights abuse cases, patterns of discrimination and instances of state intimidation. The UK also co-sponsored the UN annual resolution on human rights in Iran. Following a strong lobbying campaign with Canada, which tabled the resolution, we were pleased that it passed with an overwhelming majority of countries in favour (83 to 31).

This scrutiny was not well received in Iran, which dismissed the criticism as Western "double standards", accusing the US, UK and Canada of human rights violations themselves. It also accused the UN Special Rapporteur of being anti-Islamic. There was no indication that Iran was genuinely willing to improve its record or to engage with the international community about it. Iran continued to refuse to allow the Special Rapporteur to visit the country.

In 2013, we expect the situation to remain poor, although we will continue to press Iran for systematic improvements. Iran's presidential elections in June 2013 may prompt further repression, particularly of groups considered likely to be critical of the regime. Iran will be concerned about the potential for economic unrest caused by the increasing financial pressures on the regime – a result of its own economic mismanagement and the impact of international sanctions relating to the nuclear issue. Any economic unrest could also lead the regime to increase restrictions on basic freedoms.

The UK will continue to keep Iran's behaviour in the international spotlight, to speak out in support of the observance of universal human rights and to encourage genuine progress.

Elections

The parliamentary (Majles) elections in March 2012 passed without major protest. The elections were clearly not free and fair, with candidates being filtered at an early stage by the Guardian Council to prevent any real choice. The two opposition leaders, Mirhossein

Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi, remained under house arrest. The presidential elections in June 2013 are likely also to be tightly controlled, again with the careful selection of candidates deemed acceptable to senior members of the regime.

Freedom of expression

In 2012, Iran introduced further restrictions on Internet use, including regulations controlling public Internet cafes. A national Internet network was introduced to control the flow of information, and websites continued to be filtered. Cyber-security forces arrested and intimidated Internet users, bloggers and journalists.

Domestic media remained tightly controlled to prevent reporting on certain topics. Many journalists were arrested, subsequently reporting poor prison conditions and a lack of access to appropriate medical care. Journalists such as BBC Persian employees reported that their families in Iran continued to be harassed, arrested and interrogated.

The Iranian authorities continued to jam satellite signals, affecting Persian-language broadcasts. Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) reported that Iranian intelligence agents had discovered a ring of underground studios linked to satellite TV stations. They claimed that these were linked to counter-revolutionary groups, and arrested over 30 people.

A small number of protests were held by labour activists protesting against unpaid salaries and redundancies, as well as a protest by Iranian students on Students' Day on 6 December.

Human rights defenders

Iran's treatment of human rights defenders continued to be a matter of concern. Nasrin Sotoudeh, a human rights lawyer serving a six-year sentence, began a hunger strike in October in protest at the harassment of her family. She ended this on 4 December, after 49 days, following concessions from the prison authorities, but her health was seriously affected as a result. She won the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in October. A planned visit to Iran by MEPs was cancelled after the authorities refused them permission to visit her in prison to congratulate her. The Foreign Secretary and the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Alistair Burt, recorded video messages of support for Sotoudeh and called on the Iranian authorities to release her immediately. At the time of writing, she remains in prison.

Concerns also remain about other high-profile imprisoned lawyers in Iran, such as Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, Narguess Mohammadi, Abdolfattah Soltani and Javid Houtan Kian. Some have reported being tortured during their imprisonment and suffering long periods of solitary confinement as well as denial of access to appropriate medical care. We believe they were sentenced for their work to defend peacefully the rights of others. Soltani won the International Bar Association Human Rights Award in October, and Houtan Kian was awarded a human rights prize by the German city of Bochum in December (jointly with labour activist Sharokh Zamani).

Access to justice and the rule of law

The Iranian authorities operate outside both Iranian law and the Iranian constitution. Many of those arrested and imprisoned have been denied access to legal representation or due process. Many charges are politically motivated and discriminatory, and sentences are excessive in relation to the crime (including two men found guilty of a third offence of drinking alcohol who were given death sentences).

The Islamic Penal Code is being amended, but we remain concerned about the revised text, which retains discriminatory laws against women and non-Muslims and does not abolish the death penalty for minors. The code also permits the death penalty for blasphemy, but the definition of what would constitute a crime under this provision is unclear, allowing arbitrary application of the law. Many current prisoners have been imprisoned for long periods on loosely worded charges of "enmity against God" and "corruption on earth", which are defined as capital offences in the current draft code.

Death penalty

Iran fails to meet the most basic international legal standards for the application of the death penalty and has one of the highest numbers of executions per capita in the world. According to EU figures, 352 people were executed in 2012. This is a reduction from 436 the previous year, though the secrecy surrounding executions in Iran means that the true figure is undoubtedly much higher. May saw a spike in reported executions of up to 63 in one week. The overwhelming majority of executions are for drugs offences, which the international community does not generally consider to be a crime for which the death penalty is permitted by international law.

The UN Secretary-General reported that over 30 people were executed publicly between January and June, many by suspension strangulation, where the condemned person is winched upward slowly and death is not instantaneous. It remains possible for a judge to order death by stoning in accordance with Sharia Law, although there have been no confirmed cases of stoning for four years. A case of note where the death penalty was used involved Safieh Ghafouri, who was sentenced to death for murder on the basis of her own confession. Ghafouri was reportedly not told of her imminent execution and withdrew her confession at the gallows. Contrary to established procedure in Iran, which should then have seen her execution halted, her retraction was ignored and it went ahead.

The UK continued to condemn publicly Iran's use of the death penalty, both in public statements and in online features in English and Farsi, as well as through the EU. Iran offered a dialogue with the EU on the death penalty in October following an EU démarche on the issue, but to date has not followed this up.

Torture

Conditions in Iranian prisons remained extremely poor, with reports of deaths in custody, torture, long periods of solitary confinement and denial of medical treatment to inmates. Prison officials appeared to act with impunity. Reports by the UN Secretary-General and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran included accounts of the deaths in custody of two ethnic Ahwazi Arab activists, both of whom were allegedly tortured to death. News emerged of the death of a blogger, Sattar Beheshti, in November, less than a week after

being arrested for “actions against national security on social networks and Facebook”, and reportedly after being beaten by prison authorities. This prompted a domestic and international outcry, including public condemnation by Alistair Burt, FCO Minister with responsibility for Iran. The Iranian judicial authorities undertook to conduct an investigation into Mr Beheshti’s death and to punish those responsible. The Cyber Police Chief responsible for his arrest was later sacked, but the resulting report, which found that the previously healthy 35-year-old had died of natural causes as a result of shock, was not widely considered credible.

Freedom of religion or belief

The past year arguably saw some intensification of the systematic persecution of Iran’s minority religious communities.

Throughout 2012, we received reports of arrests and detentions of Christians, often without fair trial or legal representation. Monitoring of church congregations continued, prompting many Christians to worship in private homes, known as “house churches”. Converts were particularly targeted. Those found by the authorities to have converted to Christianity were told to revert to Islam or face arrest and apostasy charges. The release in September of Christian Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, sentenced to death for apostasy in 2010, was a rare positive outcome following sustained pressure from the international community to commute his sentence. Whilst Mr Burt welcomed news of his release, he was also clear that the arrest should not have taken place and called on Iran to respect the religious freedoms of its citizens. Pastor Nadarkhani was re-arrested on Christmas Day and briefly held in prison, although he had been released again at the time of writing. Other Christians remained in harsh conditions in prison, including Pastors Behnam Irani and Farshid Fathi.

The Iranian Baha’i community, which remains unrecognised as an official religious group in Iran, reported an escalation in the oppression of their community, concentrated in the province of Semnan in the north. There were signs of a clampdown on Baha’i economic activity there, such as the raiding and closure in May by Intelligence Ministry officials of two factories that were fully or partially owned by Baha’is. Discrimination against Baha’is included restrictions on educational and employment opportunities and attacks on the Baha’i Institute for Higher Education. The seven Baha’i leaders arrested in 2008 remained in prison to serve sentences of 20 years, having been subjected to unfair trials that did not comply with Iran’s own laws. Over 100 Baha’is were reported to be imprisoned in Iran in total at the time of writing.

The Dervish community reported to the UN Special Rapporteur that they had been subjected to arbitrary arrests, torture and incarceration, as well as attacks on their places of worship. The report contained an account of a trial in May following a demonstration at which 189 Dervishes were represented in court by only two lawyers after a judge ruled that too many lawyers would disturb court proceedings. The trial lasted only 10 days, with 18–20 people being tried each day.

Reports emerged at the end of the year about an increase in persecution of the small Jewish community in Iran.

Women's rights

The new draft of the Islamic Penal Code continues to legitimise disparities between the sexes, penalising women. A woman's testimony in court has half the value of a man's, and "blood money" paid for female murder victims is half that paid for male victims. The age of criminal responsibility for girls is set at 9 years of age, but at 14 for boys. In August, 36 universities announced that 77 fields of study would be closed to female applicants. In November, we received reports that the Majles (parliament) had passed a bill requiring all single females under the age of 40 to obtain the permission of a male guardian or spouse to travel outside Iran or to apply for a passport. This has not yet been passed into law and we will be following the bill's progress.

Minority rights

There are many different ethnic groups in Iran. As well as the Persian majority (51%), the population is made up of Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis, Turkmens, Armenians, Assyrians, Jews, Afghans and Georgians. Despite this diversity and the protection of equal rights for all in the Iranian constitution, Iran's ethnic minorities regularly suffered discrimination from central and local government. Discrimination included property confiscation, denial of state education and employment, cultural and linguistic restrictions, lack of access to water, electricity and basic sanitation in some areas such as Khuzestan and forced relocation. Iran's ethnic minorities continued to be affected by apparent government bias, fuelling ethnic-based political violence, in particular among Iranian Kurds and Baluchi communities. There was also evidence that these groups were being targeted for persecution. In June, four Ahwazi Arabs were executed in secret for "enmity against God", followed by a further five less than a month later, after what were believed to have been unfair trials and torture. The Foreign Secretary publicly condemned these executions in August and called on Iran to cease the persecution of its ethnic minorities.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues in Iran remain taboo, and homosexual acts between men attract the death penalty. In May, four men were reportedly hanged in secret on charges of homosexuality. Once again, Mr Burt spoke out against the persecution of homosexuals and Iran's shameful record of executions. This area is also of concern regarding the lack of fair trials and suspicions that such charges are sometimes falsely applied.

Afghan refugees

Iran can be credited with hosting a large number of Afghan refugees (around 30 million over 30 years) and making basic provision for them such as temporary work permits and tax exemptions, although they remained subject to discrimination. Access to education and healthcare remained restricted and they were not permitted to live in certain areas of Iran, reducing employment opportunities for them. The deterioration of the economy in Iran affected these refugees disproportionately as they were excluded, for example, from cash subsidies for food and medical costs. Illegal migrants suffered much less favourable treatment, and in July access to goods and services for illegal migrants was further restricted. In June, after two Afghans were accused of rape and murder in Yazd, many local Afghan residents were attacked, possibly with the collusion of the local security forces

according to Afghan witnesses. Vice President Rahimi publicly linked Iran's economic decline to the presence of Afghan migrants.

Iraq

Despite some progress in 2012, the human rights situation in Iraq remains difficult. However, there were some encouraging developments. The establishment in April of Iraq's Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), progress on a bill to combat domestic violence, ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, agreement of an exemplary NGO law by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and growing engagement on women's rights issues are all signs of movement in the right direction. Nevertheless, significant problems remain.

Iraq's emerging civil society faces a number of challenges, including lack of training and expertise and the difficulties which non-governmental organisations face in obtaining registration. Iraq's use of the death penalty increased dramatically during 2012, when 129 executions were carried out. Citizens continue to face difficulties gaining access to justice due to weak implementation of the law. Corruption remains endemic: Transparency International ranked Iraq 169 out of 176 in its 2012 Corruption Perception Index. Iraq's diminished religious and ethnic minority communities remain vulnerable. In the Kurdistan region, several laws designed to improve the human rights situation have been passed, but the implementation of some of these laws, for example the Family Violence Bill, has been slow.

The promotion of human rights continued to be an important part of the UK's Iraq Strategy, which was laid before Parliament in October 2012. Our priorities include supporting establishment of the ICHR, promoting women's rights and encouraging Iraq to implement its National Action Plan for Human Rights. Progress on these was mixed. Despite commissioners being appointed in April, the ICHR is not yet fully operational. The National Strategy for Women's Advancement is still in draft form after three years, although a number of women's rights groups are now working steadily towards an implementation plan for UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. On 19 December, the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) announced an implementation strategy for its National Action Plan, which was drafted in response to the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review recommendations. We regularly raised human rights concerns with senior members of the government and encouraged them to take action to meet our concerns.

Our priorities for 2013 include supporting delivery of the National Action Plan. We will continue to support the UN and other partners to develop an action plan for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Working through the EU and other partners, we will also support the development of the ICHR. We will continue to monitor the progress of legislation under consideration by the Council of Representatives, including the Freedom of Expression law and the draft Information Crimes law. We will also continue to provide training and funding for a variety of human rights projects across Iraq, with an emphasis on women's rights, freedom of expression and the rule of law.

Freedom of expression

Although Iraq enjoys a higher level of media freedom than many Arab countries, major problems still exist with legislation governing the media, and there is not yet a strong culture of supporting press freedom. Draft legislation currently being debated in the Council of

Representatives is ambiguous and has the potential to restrict journalists' ability to report freely.

Although the Committee for the Protection of Journalists reported a decrease in the number of journalists killed for reasons related to their profession, media professionals continued to suffer harassment and violence, and to be arrested without proper cause. We were particularly troubled by the closure on 16 December of two media outlets in Baghdad, al-Baghdadia TV and Radio al-Marhaba, and are concerned that the government's action represents a disproportionate use of regulatory policy. The closures followed a threat in June, subsequently retracted, by the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC) to close 44 media organisations. These included the BBC, which the CMC claimed were operating without a licence.

The UK provided funding for a local NGO (IMCK – Independent Media Centre, Kurdistan) to run media-training sessions with former BBC World presenters for 80 MPs in Erbil.

A number of demonstrations took place across Iraq during 2012, many of which were free from interference by the government. However, Human Rights Watch reported that, in response to demonstrations marking the February anniversary of the start of weekly protests, security forces in Baghdad restricted demonstrators' access to protest sites. In the Kurdistan region's Sulaymaniyah province, a number of demonstrators were reported to have been harassed, beaten and arrested.

Access to justice and the rule of law

There were reports throughout the year of people being arbitrarily detained and not being given access to legal counsel, and of prison conditions which do not meet international and domestic standards. Human Rights Watch reported that the Iraqi government had carried out mass arrests during the build-up to the Arab League Summit in Baghdad in March, and had unlawfully detained people at Camp Honor prison. This is a facility which it had claimed in March last year to have closed following reports that detainees held there had been tortured. We were particularly concerned by allegations in October of sexual and physical abuse of female detainees by prison officers.

A key problem is the lack of resources, including limited forensic capability, available to police, judges and prosecutors. This has contributed to a continued overreliance on confession-based evidence, despite Iraqi law prohibiting its use when obtained through coercion, as evidence at trial.

The UK provided funding for several projects to strengthen the rule of law and to move the Iraqi security forces away from reliance on confession-based evidence. This included contributing to the EU Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq (EUJUST LEX). We also funded a project to help develop and build a professional, accountable, non-sectarian security force. As part of a long-standing engagement programme on civil defence, the Ministry of Interior announced that they are sending 12 key staff to the UK's Civil Defence College for 18 months from February 2013.

Torture

The UN reports that many detention facilities in Iraq are overcrowded, suffer from poor sanitary conditions and lack prisoner rehabilitation programmes. There were also regular reports that authorities had not implemented court orders, including orders to release detainees after they had completed their sentence or following their trial. In some instances, there were allegations of people being detained until a bribe could be paid to secure their release. These conditions contribute to an environment where torture and other ill-treatment can take place with impunity. Iraq became a party to the Convention against Torture in 2011, and although torture is also prohibited under Article 37 of the Iraqi Constitution, there were a number of reports this year that prisoners had been subject to torture or other ill-treatment. This included NGO reports that female prisoners were routinely tortured and raped. Disappointingly, the MoHR has so far ignored calls to investigate the most recent allegations.

We remain concerned about the case of Ramze Ahmed, a dual British/Iraqi national who has been in detention in Iraq since December 2009. In his most recent and final court hearing on 20 June, he was found guilty of terrorism-related offences and sentenced to 15 years in prison in a 15-minute hearing at which his lawyer was not permitted to speak. Along with Amnesty International, we have concerns about the nature of the charges and allegations of mistreatment as well as about the trial proceedings. We continue to provide consular assistance and to raise the allegations of mistreatment with the Iraqi government.

Death penalty

The Iraqi government remains resolute on the need for the death penalty as a response to the high level of terrorist activity in Iraq, citing widespread public support for its continued application. We were deeply concerned by the increase in executions in 2012 to 123, compared to 67 in 2011 and 18 in 2010. We continued to urge the Iraqi government to introduce a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, with a view to its abolition, as pledged in the National Human Rights Plan and in the formal response from the MoHR to last year's Human Rights report. The number of offences punishable by the death penalty increased in 2012, however, with the passing of the Trafficking in Persons Law. In a high-profile case, former Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi was sentenced to death in absentia in September.

We urged the government to provide greater transparency in death penalty cases by releasing more information about charges, sentences, appeals and trial procedures. Alistair Burt MP, Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East, issued a statement on 30 August condemning the rise in executions, and we joined an EU démarche to the Iraqi parliament in Baghdad on 27 September. The UK also co-sponsored an event in Baghdad to mark World Day Against the Death Penalty.

Conflict and protection of civilians

Security has improved since the height of the insurgency in 2006–7, but attacks continue to occur on an almost daily basis, many targeted on the security services. Al-Qaeda, seeking to cause sectarian divide and destabilise the country, is believed to have been responsible for a large proportion of them. There was also an increasing pattern of coordinated attacks

against civilians involving improvised explosive devices and intended to cause mass casualties.

Following a series of car bomb attacks across Iraq on 9 September, Mr Burt issued a statement condemning the attacks and reiterating UK support for Iraqi government efforts to defeat terrorism. There have been no major attacks in the Kurdistan region since 2007.

Freedom of religion or belief

The situation for Iraq's ethnic and religious minority groups remained precarious. Minority Rights Group International ranked Iraq as the fourth most dangerous country in the world for minorities in their 2012 list of "Peoples Under Threat". A proliferation of extremist and militant groups seeking to destabilise Iraq, insufficient security and poor application of the rule of law all contributed to the violence against minority communities. We were particularly troubled by reports in September of violent raids by government of Iraq forces on Christian and Yezidi social clubs in Baghdad, reportedly for selling alcohol.

Many of those trying to escape ongoing ethnic and religious persecution in Iraq seek refuge in the northern provinces of the Kurdistan region. An estimated 80,000 families of various ethnicities and religions have fled there, including approximately 20,000 Christian families from Baghdad and Mosul. Some have found a temporary safe haven in the cities of Duhuk and Erbil; others are living in the Nineveh Plains as internally displaced persons.

Although the government has taken steps to help stem the violence by measures such as increasing security at minority places of worship and publicly condemning attacks, minority communities continue to live in fear. Following the success of a project in 2011 which resulted in a fatwa outlawing violence against religious minorities, we are funding a further series of grassroots meetings bringing together people from different faiths to combat sectarian violence. The work is being led by Canon Andrew White, who has played a key role in establishing the High Council of Religious Leaders in Iraq.

Women's rights

Women in Iraq continue to face a number of threats, notably gender-based violence. Inadequate or unimplemented legislation remains a key challenge, with "honour" still permitted by the Iraqi penal code as a mitigating factor in crimes involving violence by men against women or children. Perpetrators of crimes involving sexual violence are exonerated if they marry their victim. Surveys indicate that 21% of women have been beaten by their husbands and that in some provinces a majority of women believe that it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife under certain circumstances. More positively, the government has taken steps to address the problem of trafficking through its adoption in May of the Trafficking in Persons Law. In the Kurdistan region, the newly elected (April 2012) Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, has taken a personal interest in the promotion of women's rights, appointing his own Special Adviser on Women's Issues to work alongside the High Council of Women's Affairs to implement the Family Violence Bill.

We continue to support efforts to improve the position of women in Iraqi society, working closely with the UN, EU and other international partners. Following the success of a similar project in the Kurdistan region in 2011, we are funding a police-training project in Baghdad to

develop a more effective police response to incidents involving violence against women. In the Kurdistan region, we are funding a project run by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy to increase the participation of female parliamentarians in the Kurdistan parliament. We also funded a project to support female journalists in 2012.

The UK supported events in the Kurdistan region to mark the international campaign of "16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence". HM Consul General in Erbil was invited to speak alongside Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani at the opening of the campaign, and we published articles in several of the most widely read newspapers and news websites re-affirming the UK's commitment to tackling violence against women and girls. In contrast to 2011, when Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki publicly appealed to all government departments to strengthen legislation on domestic violence and underlined the need for more education and reform to protect women's rights, activities in central Iraq were, disappointingly, limited to a small cultural event led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Minority rights

Ethnic minorities, mostly concentrated in northern Iraq, continue to report instances of discrimination as well as considerable problems in gaining proper access to employment, healthcare and education.

In 2012, there was a continued trend of sectarian violence. Minorities located in the disputed areas of northern Iraq were disproportionately affected. For example, in August at least nine people were killed and fifty injured in an attack against a Shabak mosque in Mosul. In October, several members of the Shabak community were killed and a number of others injured after homes and businesses in Mosul identified as belonging to the group were attacked. A lack of evidence of investigation by security forces into attacks has contributed to a growing mistrust by minority communities in the security forces' ability to protect them.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

Although not illegal under Iraqi law, homosexuality is still not widely accepted in Iraq, and the situation for the homosexual community and other sexual minorities remains difficult. We were concerned by reports earlier in the year that members of the LGBT community and Iraqi followers of the "Emo" fashion culture were attacked, and in some cases murdered, for their appearance or their sexual identity (or perceived sexual identity). It is difficult to judge the accuracy of such reports or the scale of the problem. Disappointingly, and despite the evidence, the government response has been one of denial.

Camp Ashraf

Camp Ashraf is controlled by the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI), also known as the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MeK). The Iraqi government announced in 2011 its intention to close Camp Ashraf.

On 25 December 2011, as part of this process, the government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which allowed for the voluntary relocation of residents from Camp Ashraf to Camp Liberty, a former US base near Baghdad International Airport. Residents were transferred throughout the course of 2012. The final, major, relocation exercise took place in September. Some 3,100 residents are

now based at Camp Liberty. Approximately 100 remain at Camp Ashraf to dispose of residents' remaining property there.

We welcome the government's continued flexibility over its deadline to close Camp Ashraf, and its willingness to engage with UN plans to relocate residents. In accordance with its mandate, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has started assessing applications from the residents of Camp Ashraf for refugee status. The UK has re-admitted four people from Camp Ashraf holding valid UK travel documents. We have also undertaken to examine exceptionally the cases of those residents with previous refugee status in the UK but who do not have current or valid UK travel documents, subject to UNHCR confirmation of their refugee status.

We continue to urge the government of Iraq to respect the human rights of the camp's residents in accordance with international and Iraqi domestic law.

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

The human rights situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) continued to be of concern to the UK in 2012. Much of this stemmed from Israel's occupation of the OPTs and actions taken by the Israeli government in contravention of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We are also concerned about a number of human rights issues that fall under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and under the *de facto* Hamas rule in Gaza. Major events this year included an increase in hostilities between Gaza and Israel in November, an unprecedented surge in Israeli settlement plans (which are illegal under international humanitarian law, have a corrosive impact on the peace process and threaten the possibility of a two-state solution), local elections in the West Bank, mass hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons and the withholding of Palestinian tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority (PA) by Israel, which has had severe financial consequences on the ability of the PA to deliver services, including health services.

Our objectives for 2012 included working with international partners to encourage Israel to ease restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza, lobbying the Israeli government to improve the treatment of Palestinian children in Israeli detention, encouraging the holding of Palestinian elections and improving the policing of peaceful protests by the PA and the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). There have been some positive developments, including a reduction in the amount of time Israel can hold Palestinian children in pre-trial military detention, some limited easing of Israeli restrictions on Gaza, the transparent handling of local elections in the West Bank and improvement in the professionalism of the PA's policing of demonstrations later in the year. But the lack of forward momentum on the Middle East Peace Process continued to impede progress on human rights during 2012.

In 2013, the UK will continue to focus on the treatment of Palestinian detainees, including children in Israeli prisons, on settlement expansion, on reducing incitement to violence by Palestinians and Israelis, on evictions and forced transfer of Palestinian communities and on consolidation of the ceasefire in Gaza and an easing of Israeli restrictions. We will also support a large-scale international push, under US leadership, to make progress on the Middle East Peace Process. The UK has actively lobbied Israel to re-engage with the Human Rights Council and the Universal Periodic Review process. We note that Israel has requested a postponement of their review, and welcome the recent efforts of the President of the Council on this issue.

Freedom of expression and assembly

We remain concerned about IDF policing of demonstrations in the West Bank, which often involves the use of tear gas and rubber-coated bullets. In 2012, nine Palestinian protesters were killed and 3,025 injured by Israeli forces. Among those killed were off-duty Palestinian Police Officer Rushdi Tamimi in Nabi Saleh, and Hamdi al-Falah in Hebron. Internal investigations into the deaths have been opened but findings have not yet been published.

The Israeli Military Police have concluded their investigation into the death of Palestinian Activist Mustafa Tamimi, who was killed on 9 December during a non-violent protest in Nabi

Saleh. We look forward to seeing the results of this investigation, whose findings are now being examined by the Israeli government.

Instances of mishandled policing of public protests by the PA in the West Bank remained an issue this year. In July, Palestinian police used excessive force to disperse a small demonstration near the Presidential Palace. We raised our concerns with the President's Office, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice, and President Abbas condemned the way the protest had been handled. We have since noted improvements in how the Palestinian police have dealt with demonstrations, including in their response to widespread protests against price increases and wages in the West Bank in August, which they allowed to proceed. The UK continued to provide expert personnel to an EU-led police and rule of law mission in the OPTs which is helping in the development of the Palestinian civil police and supporting justice sector reform. In 2013, the UK will continue to assist in the professional development of the Palestinian security forces, including training on human rights. The UK also continues to provide support aimed at improving access to effective police and justice services for women victims of violence in the West Bank, and for a media campaign that aims to change attitudes to violence against women.

We are also concerned about internal repression in Gaza under *de facto* Hamas rule, including the closing down of the annual Palestinian Festival of Literature by Hamas police forces. The UK Government places importance on the right to freedom of expression and assembly for all.

Violence in Gaza and southern Israel

An escalation of hostilities between Israel and Gaza-based militant groups led to an eight-day conflict in November during which six Israelis (including four civilians, two of them children) and 158 Palestinians (most of them civilians, including 42 children) were killed. A large number of civilians on both sides were injured. The UK encouraged all sides to cooperate with Egyptian-led efforts to reach a ceasefire, and welcomed the ceasefire agreement reached on 21 November. The Foreign Secretary condemned indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas and other Gaza-based groups into Israel in violation of international humanitarian law and said that Hamas had, by increasing rocket attacks during 2012, been principally responsible for the crisis. At the same time, he called on Israel to take every opportunity to de-escalate their military action, to abide by international humanitarian law and to avoid civilian casualties.

Following the ceasefire on 21 November, the UK urged all sides to take advantage of the ongoing talks brokered by Egypt to deal with the underlying causes of the Gaza conflict, including securing more open access to and from Gaza for people and goods and an end to the smuggling of weapons into Gaza.

Humanitarian situation in Gaza

The violence of the recent conflict has worsened the already precarious humanitarian situation in Gaza. Gaza has the highest rate of aid dependency per capita in the world; 80% of households are dependent on humanitarian assistance for food, water, shelter or medical treatment. A UN Initial Rapid Assessment identified a number of additional emergency needs as a result of the recent hostilities, including health, infrastructure and

psycho-social care. During the conflict,10,000 individuals living in north and north-east Gaza were temporarily displaced, and an estimated 450 homes were destroyed and 8,000 damaged. On 11 December, Alan Duncan, the Minister of State for International Development, visited Gaza city and announced an additional £1.25 million in aid to address the humanitarian needs of people in Gaza.

The Israelis continue to restrict the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza, including access to agricultural and fishing areas. We believe that these restrictions damage the economy and living standards of ordinary people in Gaza without achieving Israel's security objectives. We welcomed Israel's announcement that it would extend the fishing zone and the improve flow of building materials into Gaza following the ceasefire. However, the measures taken so far have had little significant impact on the humanitarian needs of Gazans. We will continue to press for a further easing of the Israeli restrictions, working closely with the EU, UN and the Office of the Quartet Representative.

Demolitions

We have repeatedly raised our concerns with the Israeli authorities about Israeli demolition of, and evictions from, Palestinian homes and public buildings, including schools, in Area C of the West Bank (the area under full Israeli military and civilian control), as well as in East Jerusalem. The majority of house demolitions and evictions are in breach of Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. According to UN statistics, 589 structures were demolished in Area C in 2012 and 871 people displaced. Only 5% of building permits requested by Palestinians for Area C were approved. In East Jerusalem, 35% of the land has been confiscated for Israeli settlement use, with only 13% zoned for Palestinian construction, much of which has already been built on. The UK supports the Norwegian Refugee Council in its work to improve access to justice for Palestinians affected by demolitions and displacement.

Settlement construction in East Jerusalem and the West Bank

We have condemned a series of settlement announcements in 2012. We see settlements as a major obstacle to peace, illegal under international law and in direct contravention of Israeli's commitments under the 2003 Quartet Roadmap to Peace. Of particular concern was Israel's announcement on 30 November that it would advance the next stage of the planning process for the area of West Bank land known as E1. If implemented, this construction would break territorial contiguity between Palestinian East Jerusalem and the West Bank and severely reduce freedom of movement, economic development and transport links for Palestinians in the West Bank. We were also concerned by the announcement of the construction of 3,500 settlement units in Givat Hamatos, which has profound implications on the potential for East Jerusalem to be the capital of a future Palestinian state. We continue to call for a complete cessation of all settlement activity in both the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Settler violence

There was a rise in violent attacks and intimidation by extremists among the Israeli settler population against Palestinians and Israeli Arabs and their property in 2012. There was also an increase in the number of "price tag" attacks (a reaction by some extremist settlers to Israeli government policies that they see as being against their interests). These included

violence towards Palestinian civilians, vandalism of the Latrun Monastery and an arson attack on a mosque. The UN also reported the destruction of 7,500 olive trees by Israeli settlers. The UK Government continues to urge the Israeli authorities to investigate thoroughly all instances of violence by extremist settlers and to bring those guilty of such acts to trial.

Restriction on freedom of movement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem

We are deeply concerned about restrictions on freedom of movement between the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It remains difficult for Palestinians from the West Bank to enter East Jerusalem for work, education, medical treatment or religious worship. They must apply for a permit, which often takes a long time to obtain and can be refused without explanation. They must enter the city through only a limited number of checkpoints, at which there are often lengthy queues.

Palestinians in East Jerusalem risk losing their permanent right to live in East Jerusalem if they cannot prove residency for the previous seven years. More than 14,000 Palestinians have lost their Jerusalem residency status since the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967. There has been a freeze on family reunification permits allowing residents of "enemy entities", including West Bankers, to move to Israel since 2000. In addition, those from Jerusalem who move to the West Bank risk losing their Jerusalem residency status. There are no such restrictions on Israeli residents in Jerusalem.

The separation barrier along and within the West Bank contributes to the isolation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Where the barrier is constructed on the Palestinian side of the Green Line, it is also illegal under international law. The barrier further separates Palestinian families and denies Palestinian farmers access to their land.

Access to justice and the rule of law

We remained concerned about the dual court system in Israel and the OPTs. All Palestinians except those who are resident in East Jerusalem are subject to the Israeli military court system, regardless of what they are charged with, while Israeli settlers who commit offences against Palestinians or their property have been tried in the Israeli civil justice system. We are also concerned about the lack of convictions against extremist settlers responsible for violence against Palestinians and Palestinian property.

During 2012, the UK continued to support the provision of legal aid to Palestinians in Area C, East Jerusalem and Gaza, improving their access to justice and preventing demolitions and displacement. Palestinians in Area C are governed not by Israeli domestic law but by a combination of Ottoman, British and Jordanian law amended by more than 1,600 Israeli military orders. However, given the lack of Palestinian sovereignty over Area C, the only real means of redress for Palestinians is the Israeli military legal system. This causes serious inequalities in the application and effects of the law.

We have long expressed concern about Israel's excessive use of administrative detention. Under international law, administrative detention should be used only as a preventative, rather than a punitive, measure and only in cases where security concerns make it absolutely necessary. In May, approximately 2,000 Palestinian prisoners participated in a

mass hunger strike in protest against the arbitrary use of administrative detention. We called on Israel to ensure that those on hunger strike received appropriate medical care, and encouraged all sides to reach a solution that prevented loss of life. We welcomed the agreement reached on 14 May to end the strike. We particularly welcomed Israel's agreement to limit the use of administrative detention and solitary confinement, and to reinstate family visits for detainees. Following this, the number held by Israeli authorities in administrative detention declined, though it remains high (approximately 200 detainees in September 2012). We continue to monitor closely hunger strikes by Palestinian detainees, including Samer al-Barq and Ayman Sharawna.

Death penalty

PA statues permit the use of the death penalty, but a moratorium has been in place since the end of 2009 after President Abbas undertook not to ratify any death penalty sentences. The absence of a fully functioning Palestinian parliament has delayed a draft Penal Code which outlaws the use of the death penalty from entering into law.

The *de facto* Hamas government in Gaza executed six people in 2012. A further two death sentences were passed in September. The 27 EU member states condemned the sentences and called for an absolute ban on the death penalty. The UK will continue to urge that the death penalty is abolished in its entirety in both Gaza and the West Bank.

Torture

We remain concerned at reports of mistreatment of detainees by the PA security forces and the *de facto* Hamas government in Gaza. In 2012, the Independent Commission for Human Rights received 312 complaints of mistreatment. There were also 254 complaints made about detention in Gaza. These complaints focused on allegations of torture including beating, psychological pressure, standing in difficult positions for long periods of time and ill-treatment. The Independent Commission for Human Rights believes that procedures followed in cases of allegations of torture are unsatisfactory and cases are not investigated in accordance with clear and independent procedures.

There are continued allegations by NGOs of mistreatment of Palestinian detainees during arrest and in Israeli prisons and detention centres including shackling and the use of stress positions. There has been some progress in 2012; Israeli NGOs Hamoked and B'tselem assess that some work has been done on the conditions within interrogation facilities. This has led to a refurbishment of a facility in Petah Tikva prison, although at present we have no information on whether this has improved the conditions in which detainees are held.

Freedom of religion or belief

In 2012, there were examples of religious intolerance on both sides, with a synagogue defaced in the Jordan Valley and part of the Latrun Monastery outside Jerusalem set on fire. Both incidents were condemned by the Israeli and Palestinian authorities and by the UK.

Because of Israeli restrictions on movement and access, the entire population of Gaza and over 40% of the population of the West Bank are unable to attend Friday prayers at the al-Aqsa Mosque and they are also denied access to the Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. Approximately four million Palestinians are prohibited from entering East Jerusalem without

a permit. We welcomed the temporary easing of restrictions by the Israeli government on entry permits to Israel for Palestinians during Ramadan.

Minority rights

Israel's Declaration of Independence calls for the establishment of a Jewish state with equal social and political rights for all citizens, irrespective of religion, race or sex. We welcome the efforts by the Israeli government to address remaining areas of inequality and discrimination between Jews and Arabs in Israel, and we are concerned by a growing climate of intolerance. A number of minority groups within Israel continue to suffer discrimination, particularly in access to housing, education, employment, healthcare and welfare services.

We continue to monitor the Praver Plan, approved by the Israeli Cabinet in September 2011, which would relocate a large number of Bedouin from unrecognised villages to recognised towns. The plan also budgeted NIS 1.2 billion (£205 million) for economic development in recognised Bedouin communities. This element of the plan was approved on 26 March. We welcomed the government's efforts to engage with Bedouin leaders, which we hope will lead to an agreed and satisfactory solution to the long-standing issue of the unrecognised Bedouin villages. In July and November 2012, Mr Burt discussed the Praver Plan with Israeli Minister without Portfolio Benny Begin, who committed to continuing the dialogue with the Bedouin ahead of the plan coming into effect.

In 2012, we worked with a range of partners in Israel to address the issue of inequality and promote co-existence between Jews and Arabs in Israel. We allocated £250,000 for projects involving the Arab Israeli community in 2011–12. As part of this, we funded Tsofen, a non-profit organisation whose aim is to advance the economic and social equality of Arab citizens in Israel by accelerating their entry into hi-tech industry and helping Israeli's hi-tech industry to locate successfully in Arab towns.

Children's rights

We remain deeply concerned about the treatment of Palestinian children under the Israeli military court system. In 2011, the FCO funded an independent report by a team of respected British lawyers into the treatment of child detainees in Israeli military custody. The report, published in 2012, focused on the legal disparities between how the Israeli justice system treats Israeli and Palestinian minors. On the basis of the findings, it argued that Israel is in contravention of various provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also noted that transportation of child prisoners into Israel and the failure to translate military orders from Hebrew into Arabic are violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The UK has pressed the Israeli government to take action on the findings and recommendations of the report. We have welcomed some limited steps the Israeli government has taken, such as a recent military order which reduced the amount of time children could be held in pre-trial detention from eight to four days. We also welcomed the announcement by the Israeli State Attorney to reduce, from April 2013, the amount of time Palestinian minors may be held before they are brought before a judge. The UK will continue to lobby the Israeli government for further improvements, including a reduction in the number of arrests that occur at night, an end to shackling and the introduction of audio-visual recording of interrogations.

Human rights defenders

Bassem Tamimi, from the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh, was convicted of participation in illegal protests by an Israeli military court in May. He was designated a human rights defender by the EU because of his role in the non-violent protest movement and concerns about the nature of his trial and detention. He was sentenced to 13 months' imprisonment, but having spent this long in detention during the trial, was released. He was re-arrested in November, convicted of organising illegal protests in Israeli settlements and sentenced to four months' detention. The EU has expressed its concerns to the Israeli government about the treatment of Mr Tamimi.

Incitement

Incitement to terrorism and violence is unacceptable, and we condemn comments that could stir up hatred and prejudice in a region that needs a culture of peace and mutual respect. FCO Minister of State Alistair Burt condemned statements by Hamas leaders denying Israel's right to exist and comments by a Hamas official in December calling for a third intifada and a suicide campaign. In May, the UK condemned a statement made by Tayeb al-Rahim, Secretary-General of President Abbas' office, which encouraged the acts of terrorism and called on listeners to emulate recent suicide bombers.

Libya

Libya has continued to make progress towards democracy, with the appointment of the new Prime Minister, Dr Ali Zeidan, elected by the General National Congress (GNC) on 14 October, and the swearing in of a new government on 14 November. Libya now has its first democratically elected Prime Minister and government in over 40 years. However, a number of human rights concerns remain, and the lack of government control of security continues to present a major challenge to the protection of human rights.

The Libyan government has made public commitments to upholding human rights in the new Libya. During an address to the UN General Assembly in September, the President of the GNC, Dr Mohammed Magarief, gave assurances that Libya would respect human rights and its international obligations and highlighted specific measures that it would put in place. The Prime Minister, Dr Ali Zeidan, a former human rights activist who co-founded and served as the spokesperson for the Libyan League for Human Rights from 1989 to 2002, said that the new Libya would be based on "the rule of law, human rights and democracy".

Security poses the greatest challenge in the immediate future. Libya faces significant difficulties as it seeks to overcome nearly half a century of dictatorship and to integrate former revolutionary fighters into state structures. Some armed groups have been incorporated into state bodies, but many are still operating independently. There have been a number of serious security incidents, most notably the September attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi, which resulted in the deaths of the US Ambassador and other US officials. In June, an attack against the British Ambassador's convoy in Benghazi led to the decision to suspend the UK Office's operations in Benghazi. Immediate and vociferous protests by large numbers of Libyans against these attacks, however, is evidence that there is a strong desire to embed respect for human rights, and an effective and accountable security apparatus, in their country.

The judiciary is functioning to a limited extent but there continue to be reports of arbitrary arrest and mistreatment of detainees, particularly in areas outside government control. Other key concerns are women's and minority rights, freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression, in particular media freedom.

Our strategy in 2012 focused on supporting the Libyan authorities in establishing central control of the judicial sector (essential to addressing some of the outstanding human rights issues), creating a democratic framework to promote basic freedoms and rights and tackling legacy issues, including establishing a fair process to deal with detainees and former Qadhafi supporters.

The UK continues to work through the EU and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to provide coordinated assistance to the Libyan authorities through the tri-departmental Conflict Pool (FCO/DFID/MOD) and the FCO–DFID Arab Partnership Fund. The past year saw an extensive package of support, including strategic advice on restoring public security and promoting the rule of law, support to the Judicial Police through a prison reform project, the provision of forensics equipment and training for the Judicial Police, a substantial contribution to the UN elections fund and training of domestic electoral

observers, focusing on women and youth groups. These projects increased the participation of citizens in the democratic process and election-monitoring training programmes. We are exploring what additional support we can provide in 2013.

Elections

Libyans went to the polls on 7 July for the first time in 47 years – a significant moment in the country's political transition. International observers concluded that the elections were conducted in a transparent and fair manner. They were largely peaceful, despite some attempted disruption. Of those who had registered, 62% turned out to vote. Almost half were women, and 33 women were elected to the 200-seat GNC. The proposed cabinet was approved in November 2012. The next milestones include the drafting of a new constitution and the holding of further elections in 2014.

Judiciary

The Libyan judicial system is not yet fully functioning, despite efforts made by the interim government to rebuild institutions. Many of the police officers, prison guards, lawyers and judges who left during the revolution have not returned. Court cases are often adjourned rather than dealt with immediately by judges, or do not progress as quickly as they should. Amnesty International has reported that many lawyers operating in Libya are refusing to represent individuals accused of committing crimes during the revolution due to concerns about personal safety.

Despite a weak and under-resourced post-conflict system, there were some positive improvements in dealing with non-conflict-related crimes. Most individuals have access to lawyers, either state or privately funded, and straightforward civil cases are processed within reasonable timeframes. However, conflict-related detainees are not processed through the court system because of the political sensitivities surrounding their cases. In addition, those detainees with strong links to militia groups are not being prosecuted because lawyers and judges are fearful of reprisals by members of the militia group.

Former regime figures

A number of members of the former Qadhafi regime are detained in Libya awaiting trial on a range of charges. They include Saif al-Islam Qadhafi, son of Qadhafi, Abdullah al-Senussi, Qadhafi's former Intelligence Chief and al-Mahmoudi al-Baghdadi, Qadhafi's last Prime Minister. Saif al-Islam and al-Senussi are also subject to International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrants for alleged crimes against humanity. For most Libyans, their detention marks an important step in bringing closure to the Qadhafi era and building a new democratic Libya. It is important that all detainees are held in accordance with Libyan law, by a legitimate authority, and have access to legal representation and medical care. The way in which high-profile former regime figures are treated presents an opportunity for Libya to demonstrate its commitment to ensuring fair trials, to cooperating fully with the ICC and to meeting international standards in the protection of human rights.

Detainees

Approximately half of Libya's detention facilities are under some form of government control, but most are in practice run by militias. The Minister of Justice, with the support of the UN, aims to bring all detention facilities under the control of the Judicial Police. It is not possible

yet to verify the precise number of conflict-related detainees across the country, but the UN believes that there are up to 8,000 people in this category currently being held in Libya, in substandard conditions and at risk of torture. There has been consistent reporting from international NGOs about conditions in detention centres, particularly those outside government control, and the mistreatment of detainees. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Médecins Sans Frontières have all had direct access to detention facilities, and have raised concerns about the conditions, the treatment of individuals in them and in particular the treatment of migrants in detention. Overcrowding, lack of food and medical supplies and allegations of mistreatment and torture have been reported. Amnesty International has produced detailed reports of abuse of detainees. Médecins Sans Frontières suspended its work in Misratan detention facilities in January after dealing with patients who had been tortured or abused. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya reported that three detainees had died as a result of abuse in Misrata in May.

The UK has raised concerns over detainees with the Prime Minister and Justice Minister, including the need to ensure that people are kept in conditions which meet international human rights standards. The International Centre for Prison Studies (ICPS), whose work the UK is funding, has provided support to the Ministry of Justice and Libyan Judicial Police.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Since the revolution, freedom of expression and assembly have improved significantly. Hundreds of new media outlets have emerged, including new TV and radio stations. Social media usage has increased dramatically, and there is greater access to information on the Internet. The GNC President, Dr Mohammed Magarief, has publicly confirmed that no censorship will be imposed on the media and they will be granted complete freedom to perform their duties. The GNC has created a Ministry of Information, although its mandate is unclear.

Journalists in Libya often lack experience and skills, and are keen to receive training. There have been some reports that media outlets are linked to particular political parties and produce biased reports. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of reports of some media outlets and journalists being threatened for criticising militia groups or government activity. The UK has provided media training to build capacity.

Under the Qadhafi regime, demonstrations were permitted only in support of the regime. Protests against the regime were put down, often violently. The new government, by law, allows people to gather and demonstrate against them. There have been numerous demonstrations outside, and inside, the GNC Hall. Demonstrations have also occurred in cities and towns across Libya.

Minority rights

The majority of Libya's population is Arab, but there are significant minority groups including the Tuareg, Amazigh and Tebu. Under the Qadhafi regime, minority groups were often marginalised and were not afforded the same rights as other Libyans. The new government has made a commitment to ensuring that all Libya's citizens have the same rights and are treated equally.

The main concern for Libya's minority groups is to ensure that their rights are protected under the new constitution. Several groups are requesting that their language is officially accepted and recognised. As Libya undergoes the process of drafting a new constitution it will be important that the minority groups' voices are heard. The UK has raised the importance of minority rights with senior government officials, and will work with minority groups as part of our wider support for civil society.

Freedom of religion or belief

At least 97% of the Libyan population are Muslim. The Libyan government has committed to ensuring that the new constitution reflects the rights of all minorities, including religious groups. However, there have been a number of reports of Libyans receiving threats or being unlawfully detained for behaviour considered to be at odds with Islamic tradition. In November, reports emerged that 12 men, believed to be homosexual, had been detained and threatened with execution by an armed group wanting to enforce a strict form of Islam. The destruction of a number of ancient Sufi shrines on the grounds that they were "un-Islamic" and the attack against the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church in Misrata, resulting in two deaths, highlight the need for the government to honour its commitment to protect the rights of all of its citizens.

Death penalty

Libya still retains the death penalty, although there have been no executions since liberation. In November, there were reports that a military court in Benghazi issued the death penalty against a number of individuals in absentia for crimes committed during the revolution. The UK has raised its opposition to the death penalty with the Libyan government.

Women's rights

In the July elections, 33 women were elected to the GNC – 32 on the party list system and one as an independent candidate. This represented 16.5% of the total number of seats.

There were allegations of widespread sexual and gender-based violence during the revolution. In March, the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) reported that this fell into two main categories, women who were beaten and raped by armed men in their homes or elsewhere and sexual violence and torture of both men and women in detention centres, who belonged to militia groups or were supportive of such militia groups.

In 2012, the UK continued its work to promote women's rights in Libya. We have allocated over £2 million to projects to enable women to achieve greater social, economic and political inclusion and influence.

Migrants

There have been a number of reports of ill-treatment and torture of migrants, particularly those from sub-Saharan Africa, in detention centres. Under the Qadhafi regime, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa were encouraged to settle in Libya and were given identity cards allowing them to live and work there legally. During the revolution many were supportive of the Qadhafi regime. Since the revolution many who were given identity documents by the regime now have difficulty in obtaining official documents demonstrating they have the

authority to reside in Libya. This will have an immediate impact on their ability to access government services, including education and medical facilities.

There has also been an increase in the number of migrants entering Libya who are fleeing war-torn countries or have faced persecution and threats to their lives. Libya is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, nor its 1967 Protocol, nor has it developed its own national asylum legislation.

Supporting Libyan domestic election observers. The Arab Partnership Fund supports Electoral Reform International Services

Pakistan

The picture in Pakistan remains complex. There have been some positive political and legal developments, but there remain also acute human rights challenges in a very difficult security environment. The state carried out the first execution in four years in November and there continue to be reports of mistreatment and extrajudicial killings by the security forces with impunity. The past year has seen significant terrorist and sectarian violence and continuing persecution of religious and ethnic minorities. The government of Pakistan has made some progress, continuing the legislative successes of 2011, by passing bills to create a new National Commission for Human Rights and to protect women from violence, but it needs to go further to ensure that these meet international standards, and it will also be judged on how well it implements the legislation. The National Commission was still not up and running six months after the bill establishing it was passed. This year, Pakistan was elected to the UN Human Rights Council and went through its second Universal Periodic Review. The international community will be monitoring its response to the recommendations.

In last year's report, we identified several human rights objectives for 2012: freedom of expression and religion, implementation of international treaties, democracy and elections and promotion of the rule of law, child and maternal health and women's rights. We took these forward through a range of projects and targeted dialogue with the Pakistani authorities. Success was mixed, but the government responded on some legislative issues and FCO and UK aid projects have had a positive impact.

Elections in 2013 will be a vital step on the path to a strong, stable and democratic Pakistan. Helping Pakistan to deliver elections which are credible and that lead to a peaceful transfer of power will be a top priority for the UK in 2013. We will also encourage Pakistan, and its new government, to step up its implementation of international obligations on human rights. Essential changes will only happen with the political support of the authorities. We will continue to focus on the rights of minorities and women, through frank senior-level discussions and project work.

Elections

Federal and Provincial elections due in 2013 will be a crucial milestone in Pakistan's democratic history. It will be the first time in Pakistan that a civilian government has completed its full term and democratically transferred power to another. Our discussions in 2012, continuing into 2013, have called for elections which are credible and acceptable to the Pakistani people. The Foreign Secretary, the Development Secretary and the Senior FCO Minister Baroness Warsi all raised the importance of the elections, including ensuring that women and minorities are able to vote, during their visits to Pakistan in 2012.

Political violence is widespread in Pakistan and the possibility of an escalation of violence around the elections is a serious concern. We will continue to call on all parties to ensure that elections are peaceful and free from fraud and that citizens, including women and minority groups, are able to vote without intimidation. This will be vital to building citizens' trust in the electoral process and the credibility of democratic government.

The UK is supporting the Electoral Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in their electoral preparations through a three-year programme focused on sustainable capacity-building based on international best practice. For example, DFID is funding the training of election staff, helping to refine the electoral dispute resolution mechanism, enabling the ECP to update their electoral operations systems and supporting an ECP voter education strategy, with a specific focus on encouraging women to vote. We are providing 41,000 ballot boxes to increase the number of polling stations to enable more people to vote in remote areas. We are also supporting civil society to increase voter education, helping disadvantaged groups (especially women) register for the elections, training more than 40,000 election monitors and observing the performance of elected representatives and public institutions.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Pakistan's vibrant media continued to challenge the establishment and stand up for human rights issues in 2012. Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Hina Rabbani Khar, acknowledged the importance of the media and civil society in this regard in her statement to the UN for Pakistan's Universal Periodic Review in October. However, as both Reporters Without Borders and the South Asia Free Media Association have highlighted, Pakistan remains an extremely dangerous place for journalists to operate and report freely. There have been several reports of threats to journalists, most publicly by the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) in response to reporting of the shooting of Malala Yousafzai.

Human rights defenders can also receive threats. For example, Pakistani media reported in June that Asma Jahangir, a leading human rights lawyer and advocate of the Supreme Court Bar Association, claimed there was a plan by the Pakistani authorities to assassinate her. The then Minister for South Asia, Alistair Burt, met Ms Jahangir to express support for the critical work which she and others do in Pakistan to defend human rights.

Access to justice and the rule of law

The federal government has successfully steered through a succession of laws on human rights in the last two years, but implementation will remain a challenge until Pakistan can address issues surrounding the rule of law. Corruption and low standards of integrity plague law enforcement throughout the country and impact on almost all human rights issues as offenders are often able to act with impunity. Reports of mistreatment of those in police custody continue to surface and we see little evidence of the authorities taking these allegations seriously.

This is an issue we can help to address through project work, though the solution will not come until Pakistan takes action itself at federal, provincial and district level. In 2012, we ran workshops in Mirpur, where many cases involving British nationals originate, to raise police officers' awareness of their human rights obligations. We also saw the start of a multi-year UK-led programme with Pakistan to strengthen the country's capacity to tackle terrorism through the criminal justice system, in line with international obligations. The UK is also working at a provincial level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to increase access to justice, especially for women, and provide paralegal and local mediation support to resolve less serious disputes, increasing capacity for the courts to deal with more serious criminal cases.

Death penalty

The year saw the first execution in Pakistan since a *de facto* moratorium was put in place by President Zardari in 2008. Muhammed Hussain, a soldier who murdered his commanding officer, was hanged in November following conviction by a military court in 2009. The Pakistani government has said this was a military case and does not breach the moratorium.

In October, prior to Muhammed Hussain's execution, one of the UK's recommendations to Pakistan during its Universal Periodic Review was to make the moratorium official. Making progress on this in Pakistan will require political resolve. We will continue to urge the Pakistani authorities not to return to regular executions in 2013 following the change of government.

Conflict and protection of civilians

Pakistan continues to deal with a high rate of terrorist and sectarian violence, in particular in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta and wider Balochistan. State security forces, supporters of political parties, sectarian groups and wider communities are the most frequent targets. The perpetrators are rarely caught and brought to justice. The people of Pakistan will always have our sympathy, our understanding and our robust support in addressing these problems.

During the latter half of 2012, human rights activists, the media, minorities and NGO health workers were increasingly targeted. The attack by the TTP in early October on Malala Yousafzai, the 14-year-old girls' rights activist, shocked Pakistan and the world. The UK government strongly supports Malala's, and the government of Pakistan's, efforts to ensure that all children in Pakistan have access to education in a safe environment, free from the threat of terrorism.

The ongoing conflict between security forces and militants in Pakistan raises human rights concerns, particularly over the reported conduct of the Pakistani forces. Amnesty International produced a detailed report in December on human rights abuses in the FATA, many of which resulted from the conflict in the region. We run a number of projects in the FATA to strengthen civil society and support those who work for reform and peace.

There are regular allegations of similar human rights abuses in Balochistan, particularly reports of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. We welcome the judiciary's attempts to hold the security forces to account. We supported a 10-day visit to Pakistan at the government's invitation by the UN Working Group for Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, but were disappointed that they were not able to meet representatives of the security forces.

We raised a number of these issues with Pakistan bilaterally and during its Universal Periodic Review at the UN in October, including reports of extrajudicial killings and the need to ensure effective implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Convention against Torture. We regularly raise the need to maintain human rights and the rule of law in fighting terrorism with senior military and government figures. Human rights will continue to be a core consideration in any security and justice sector assistance we give to the Pakistani authorities.

Freedom of religion or belief and minority rights

Although there were small signs of progress, on the whole 2012 was another difficult year for Pakistan's minorities. There were a number of violent, and lethal, attacks against Shia Muslims and Hazaras. The murder of 20 Shia pilgrims travelling by bus outside Quetta on 30 December is sadly one of many such incidents. We receive regular reports from many communities – including Christian, Hindu, Ahmaddi, Sufi, Shia and minority ethnic communities – who continue to face intimidation and violence, forced conversion, destruction of property and vandalism of graves and other forms of targeted persecution and discrimination. Misuse of the blasphemy laws against Muslims and non-Muslims continued.

We welcomed President Zardari's speech in August recognising the problems faced by minorities in Pakistan, and the efforts of those in government to address the situation. These included their public stand on high-profile cases such as that of Rimsha Masih, the young Christian girl arrested for blasphemy in August, whose case was dismissed by the courts. But recognition of the problem by the government of Pakistan needs to be translated into real, sustainable progress for all Pakistan's minorities. FCO projects supported interfaith dialogue and campaigns to encourage Pakistan's political parties to recognise the electoral power of minority communities. Ministerial engagement includes regular lobbying of the federal and provincial governments encouraging them to guarantee the rights of all citizens.

Women's rights

There have been a number of federal legislative successes over the last two years on women's rights. These have been particularly aimed at protecting women from violence, including acid attacks. In 2012, however, Pakistan fell to 134th out of 135 countries in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, scoring particularly low in education, economic participation and health.

These are all issues targeted by UK aid. For instance, in the last few years in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where Malala Yousafzai lived and campaigned for girls' education, small cash stipends provided by UK aid have helped more than 400,000 girls to stay in school. We are encouraging women's greater participation in the economy by supporting training in new skills and helping women to access financial services such as micro-loans. Our work with civil society is helping to strengthen provincial legislation on women's rights and encouraging citizens to reject violence against women and other marginalised groups. We have also supported the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF), who help survivors of acid attacks and work to eliminate acid violence in the country.

We have also targeted projects on improving women's political participation. FCO projects have included supporting gender-sensitive media reporting and DFID is supporting the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), a civil society network that helps women and other disadvantaged groups to register on the electoral roll and actively participate in the democratic process.

Russia

The start of 2012 was marked by mass protests following reports of alleged electoral fraud in the parliamentary elections of December 2011. Citizens were able to assemble freely and express dissent, and there were hints of a shift towards greater openness through proposed political reforms. From May, this trend was reversed. By the end of the year there had been a marked deterioration, characterised by attempts to control civil society, restrict political opposition and marginalise minority groups. Human Rights Watch called these moves "unprecedented in the post-Soviet era". Several key events signposted the direction of travel. Domestic and international observers of the presidential election reported indications of electoral malpractice, protests on the eve of the presidential inauguration in May saw violent clashes between protesters and the police, and opposition politicians have faced increasing pressure. The two-year sentence given to the feminist punk group Pussy Riot was widely considered to be a disproportionate response to an expression of political belief.

A package of restrictive legislative measures that constrained the environment for civil society, most notably a law requiring many foreign-funded NGOs to register as "foreign agents", as well as new laws on libel and treason, gave rise to particular concern. Minority groups have also been affected through restrictive legislation passed in several Russian regions, including St Petersburg. There are plans to introduce this at a federal level. Positive developments have come in the sphere of disabled people's rights, including progress on accessibility measures following Russia's ratification in May of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Our human rights objectives for 2012 focused on elections and democracy, protecting and promoting freedom of expression, supporting stability in the North Caucasus, development of the rule of law and progress towards greater equality and reduced discrimination. Our aim is to support the long-term development of human rights and democracy in Russia, underpinned by a vibrant civil society. Progress for disabled people's rights in 2012 has followed several years of sustained UK support for Russian NGOs working in this area. UK-funded projects totalling £1.2 million run by Russian NGOs have this year contributed to gradual progress in several other areas, including enabling Russian citizens to access justice through the European Court of Human Rights, raising awareness about LGBT rights and supporting the expansion of independent media.

In 2012, we spoke publicly on human rights in Russia and engaged in high-level lobbying on a number of issues. The Prime Minister raised human rights concerns in his meeting with President Putin in August. The Foreign Secretary did so when he met Foreign Minister Lavrov in May. At the annual UK–Russia Human Rights Dialogue in London in July, senior officials discussed a wide range of subjects including restrictive new legislation passed earlier in the year, freedom of assembly and expression, protection of human rights defenders, the situation in the North Caucasus and the Magnitsky case (see Access to justice and the rule of law, below), as well as human rights in the UK. We made regular public statements of concern about human rights and democracy issues throughout the year, including on the conduct of elections and the new law on NGOs. We engaged regularly with human rights activists and conducted first-hand assessments on the situation on the ground,

including monitoring elections, political rallies and LGBT rights demonstrations. We also worked with the EU and other like-minded partners to deliver our human rights objectives.

In the first half of 2013, Russia's human rights record will be examined for the second time under the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review process. We will play an active part in the review, which will provide an opportunity to discuss challenges and identify steps to bring about improvement. In 2013, the five priority themes for our human rights work will remain democracy, freedom of expression, the North Caucasus, the rule of law and equality and non-discrimination. We will monitor developments on the passage of further restrictive legislation, such as the draft federal law prohibiting the "propaganda of homosexuality to minors", which the Duma passed at the first reading in January, and the implementation of the new legislation passed in 2012. We will maintain our focus on the NGO climate and supporting civil society. Building on unprecedented interest in the London Paralympic Games, we will continue also to support the rights of disabled people in Russia, which will host the next Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2014.

Elections

Prime Minister Putin won the Russian presidential election in March with over 60% of the vote, according to the Russian Central Election Commission. The OSCE ODIHR observer mission concluded that the voting process was technically well run, but voters' choice was limited, electoral competition lacked fairness and the count was marred by irregularities. The Russian electoral rights organisation Golos pointed to credible examples of electoral malpractice such as multiple-voting and ballot-box-stuffing. Political competition was limited during the campaign period, with several candidates prevented from entering the race, owing to the requirement to collect two million signatures of support in order to register their candidacies. ODIHR described this as "excessively burdensome" and noted the clear advantage given to Prime Minister Putin in media coverage. The Foreign Secretary made a statement stressing that all allegations of electoral violations should be thoroughly investigated.

Laws liberalising the process of registering political parties and reinstating the direct election of regional governors were passed in April. These reforms offered prospects of a more open and competitive electoral system, but have so far had little impact in practice. Despite the registration of many new political parties, including several previously obstructed from registering, none were able to make significant gains in regional elections during the year. Gubernatorial elections in October lacked significant competition, with the introduction of "filters" limiting the ability of new candidates to register.

Freedom of expression and assembly

The year began with the authorities demonstrating a more open approach to freedom of assembly, including during the presidential election campaign period. Both opposition and pro-Putin groups were permitted to hold a number of large protests. Violent clashes between protesters and the police took place on 6 May, the eve of President Putin's inauguration, as thousands of Russians protested in Moscow in support of fair elections. The following weeks saw widespread arrests of peaceful protesters across Moscow. A new law was introduced which results in fines rising from 2,000 to 300,000 Roubles (£6,000) for

individuals who participate in unsanctioned rallies, and from 5,000 to 1,000,000 Roubles (£20,000) for the organisers.

A law passed in July reinstated libel as a criminal offence, punishable by harsh financial penalties. Human Rights Watch described this move as "regressive and out of step with international human rights law". Another new law increased regulation of the Internet. Although principally intended to protect minors from harmful online content, many human rights activists expressed concern that the increased powers could be used to impose censorship more widely. Reporters Without Borders said that "the latest legislative initiatives give all the appearance of a concerted attack on freedom to disseminate information. In each of these bills, imprecise language and vague definitions are far too open to interpretation."

The second half of the year saw increased pressure on and harassment of opposition politicians. Prominent opposition deputy Gennady Gudkov was expelled from the Duma. Although this was ostensibly over his alleged business dealings, many independent commentators linked the move to his outspoken support for the opposition protest movement. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny was charged with large-scale embezzlement, a move which also raised questions of political motivation.

In July, three members of feminist punk group Pussy Riot were convicted for performing an anti-Putin protest song in Moscow's main cathedral and given a two-year sentence in a prison colony. The UK and many others in the international community criticised the sentence. Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt issued a statement condemning the sentence as a disproportionate response to an expression of political belief, and the Prime Minister raised the case with President Putin during their meeting in London in August. In October, a Moscow court suspended the sentence of Pussy Riot member Yekaterina Samutsevich. Her release is welcome but many areas of concern remain, including the long period of detention of the three suspects without bail and the upholding of the two-year sentences for Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina.

In April, President Medvedev announced the launch of a new public television channel. This was widely seen as signalling increased media freedom, but there has been little change since then in the controls exercised over the media.

Civil society

A new law on NGOs entered into force in November. This requires an NGO in receipt of foreign funding and engaged in (vaguely defined) "political activities" to register with the Ministry of Justice and identify itself publicly as a "foreign agent". The move has been severely criticised by human rights organisations. Amnesty International expressed concern that the law would "stifle civil society development in Russia and is likely to be used to silence critical voices". We made clear that labelling NGOs with a term that generates mistrust could only have a negative impact on the freedom of civil society. At the end of 2012, uncertainty remained about how the new law would be applied in practice, with many NGOs unsure whether their work constituted "political activity". Very few were considering labelling themselves "foreign agents". Some NGOs, such as the Moscow Helsinki Group,

have announced that they will no longer accept foreign funding in order to avoid this requirement. Others have said they will contest the law as unconstitutional.

A law expanding the definition of treason came into force in November. The law could now apply to Russian citizens who represent international organisations, and human rights activists are concerned that it is likely to increase self-censorship.

Human rights defenders

Concerns about the environment in which human rights defenders operate in Russia have increased in the last year. Many are subject to harassment and violence. At particular risk are those who work on issues related to the conflict in the North Caucasus, elections, corruption, xenophobia and nationalism, and LGBT rights. Those who criticised the authorities were routinely targeted throughout the year. Activists of the Joint Mobile Group of Russian human rights organisations in Chechnya faced severe harassment and intimidation.

On 5 December, Kazbek Gekkiyev, a journalist who worked for Russian state television news in the North Caucasus, was shot dead. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović, expressed her concern over the attack and called for early steps to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Impunity for past attacks on Russian human rights defenders and journalists remained a major problem in 2012. During the year, investigations continued into the murders of human rights defenders Natalia Estemirova and Anna Politkovskaya without producing conclusive results.

We have regular direct contact with human rights defenders, provide support to those who are subject to harassment and raise their cases with the Russian authorities.

Access to justice and the rule of law

In 2012, the application of rule of law in Russia remained inconsistent, as underlined by several high-profile human rights cases. Opposition activist Leonid Razvozzhayev was allegedly abducted from Ukraine in October following his appeal for political asylum in Kyiv. Razvozzhayev's lawyers say that confessions were extorted from him through unlawful means while he was in police custody in Russia. Amnesty International said that these reports were "extremely disturbing" and called on Russia to ensure that the allegations are "promptly, thoroughly, effectively and independently investigated".

More than three years after the death in pre-trial detention of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, there has been no meaningful progress towards securing justice. Magnitsky's death has come to symbolise the failings of Russia's judicial and prison systems. In meetings with their Russian counterparts, the Foreign Secretary and Minister for Europe David Lidington urged the Russian authorities to press forward with their investigation and hold those responsible to account.

continues to raise concerns about the rule of law in Russia. We regard their imprisonment as having worrying implications for the rule of law in the country. The Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, met Khodorkovsky's relatives in February and called on the Russian authorities to strengthen respect for the law, tackle corruption and promote genuine independence of the judiciary.

The UK and Russian Justice Ministries continued a programme of cooperation in 2012, looking to share expertise and improve standards. In 2012, we funded a number of practical projects focused on judicial cooperation and developing the rule of law in Russia.

Torture

Torture and deaths in police custody in Russia remain of great concern. In March, Sergei Nazarov died in Kazan after he was brutally assaulted in police custody. The incident provoked local protests and raised national awareness of the issue. Impunity continues to be a serious problem. The case of Islam Umarpashayev, who was tortured while being illegally detained by Russian security forces in Chechnya during 2010, remained unresolved this year. We have made clear that there needs to be real and systemic change in this area.

In November, the UN Committee against Torture published its report on Russia's compliance with the 1987 Convention against Torture and Other Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The report strongly criticised Russia for failing to investigate widespread allegations of torture, intimidation, harassment and attacks against those who monitor and report on human rights. The committee expressed serious concern about numerous allegations that detainees have been tortured to extract confessions which were then used as evidence in court, and failure to ensure that all detainees have the right to access a lawyer.

In 2012, we continued to support the Russian NGO Committee against Torture, who work to expose torture by law enforcement officials and ensure that they are prosecuted, and we also provided training to the police on how to fulfil their human rights obligations.

Conflict and protection of civilians

The situation in the North Caucasus region remained unstable and tense, with ongoing low-level violence. According to the independent news agency Caucasian Knot, 700 people were killed and 511 injured in 2012 as a result of the conflict; 91 of those killed and 113 of those injured were civilians. The attacks included a number against Muslim religious leaders, which the authorities blamed on radical Islamic insurgents. Throughout the year, there were also reports of grave human rights violations committed by state security forces, including allegations of extrajudicial killings, torture and disappearances. We have expressed concern about the low success rate in investigating and bringing to justice those responsible. We have called for Russia to implement fully key European Court of Human Rights judgments, and have called for action on individual cases through the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers.

In 2012, the UK became a contributor to the Council of Europe's Human Rights Trust Fund, which is currently running a project to support implementation of European Court of Human Rights judgments on the operations of the security forces in Chechnya. We also supported a range of conflict prevention projects in the North Caucasus. These focused on building

trust and facilitating dialogue between conflicting groups, and on tackling impunity for human rights violations in the region. With our support the New Eurasia Foundation NGO ran a programme to build links between youth leaders and young politicians from different communities across the region, and the Chechen Human Rights Centre provided human rights training to Chechen police and prosecutors.

Freedom of religion or belief

The Russian Constitution provides, in theory, for freedom of religion. The most prominent religious groups (the Russian Orthodox, Muslim, Buddhist and Jewish faiths) are able to operate and worship freely, albeit with some restrictions. But non-recognised religions, such as Protestantism, continue to face bureaucratic obstacles in a range of areas, including in acquiring legal status, establishing places of worship or distributing religious literature. Some Russian legislation remained a barrier to religious freedom, including statutes on "extremism" which were used to restrict the activities of minority religions. Our Embassy in Moscow engaged with a range of religious representatives throughout the year, including members of religious minorities.

Women's rights

Women in Russia continue to face high levels of violence. The Anna Centre, a Russian NGO, reported that the absence of federal legislation on domestic violence was a significant barrier to tackling the issue. Following a visit to London in 2011 where Russian legislators studied UK approaches to preventing violence against women, 2012 saw progress in formulating Russian legislation in this field. We hope to see this introduced in 2013. During 2012, we also funded a project run by the Russian NGO Ekaterina, which worked with Russian authorities in the Urals region to prevent and deal with domestic violence.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

During the year, regional legislation was passed in 10 Russian regions, including St Petersburg, which prohibits "propaganda of homosexuality and paedophilia to minors". In January 2013, the State Duma passed the first reading of a draft law which would apply such a ban at the federal level. We condemn discrimination in all its forms and will make clear to Russia that all individuals should enjoy the right to freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

Disability rights

There have been continued positive developments in the sphere of disabled people's rights, including progress on accessibility measures following Russia's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As part of efforts to build on the awareness of disability rights generated by the London Paralympic Games, the British Embassy in Moscow supported the Breaking Down Barriers Film Festival organised by Russian disability rights NGO Perspektiva. The UK, jointly with Russia, Brazil and Korea as future host nations of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, released a communiqué pledging to use the games to promote and embed respect for human rights across the world.

Saudi Arabia

Key areas of concern to the UK in Saudi Arabia include restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly in the Eastern Province and elsewhere in the country, the continued use of the death penalty (where the number of executions remains close to the 2011 figures), restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, discrimination against women, and a justice system which still falls short of international standards. The year saw a number of localised protests and demonstrations in the Eastern Province, primarily among the Shia community. Protests intensified in the second half of the year and turned violent following the arrest of Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr in July for remarks about the security forces and members of the Royal Family. More positively, we have seen some modest improvements in women's rights, including the first ever participation of female Saudi athletes in the Olympics at London 2012. We welcomed the appointment of a new head of the Commission for Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which led to more open and moderate exercise of its powers. There has also been further reform of the justice system with increased judicial training, better technology and media access to trials. We also expect to see some reforms in the status of migrant workers, with a set of proposals currently being reviewed by the Council of Ministers.

In recognition of our assessment that it will be some time before the abolition of the death penalty is a realistic possibility, we pressed for the application of EU minimum standards for capital punishment. The Saudi Justice Minister agreed to further discussion on execution methods following his meeting with Baroness Warsi in April, and the President of the National Society for Human Rights, Dr Mufleh al-Qahtani, agreed to raise with the Saudi Arabian government the request by the FCO Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Alistair Burt, for the cessation of public executions on the grounds that they were not prescribed in the Koran.

We sought to increase our understanding of the cultural sensitivities surrounding women's rights issues in Saudi Arabia and to support reforms. The British Embassy in Riyadh supported Saudi female participation at the London Olympics to which some conservative sections of Saudi society were opposed.

We also responded to allegations of torture. We promoted the benefits of greater transparency and accountability in the Saudi Arabian justice system. A visit to the UK by the Saudi Justice Minister in April for discussions with ministers, parliamentarians and judges, included a visit to the Old Bailey and Belmarsh Prison to demonstrate the value of an open and transparent justice system.

We pressed, too, for greater religious freedom in Saudi society. Ministers lobbied for greater access for expatriates to public facilities for worship. But while people are allowed to practise their faith in private, it is likely to be some time before Saudi society is ready openly to accept the public practice of other religions within Saudi Arabia.

In 2013, we expect there to be continued progress on rights for women and migrant workers, and continuing reforms to parts of the justice system. We expect localised unrest to persist in the Eastern Province with associated restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly.

Human rights defenders and civil society organisations will continue to find it difficult to operate in Saudi Arabia, the death penalty will remain in place and we will probably hear more reports of long detentions without trial and allegations of torture. Child marriage is still likely to occur and the restrictions on freedom of religion and belief will remain. Our objectives will be to support efforts to increase political participation by reinforcing the authorities' endeavours to give citizens a meaningful stake in the governance of their country, to encourage increased transparency, accountability and effectiveness of Saudi institutions by supporting reforms to the criminal justice system, encouraging the rule of law and reducing corruption and to promote freedom and fairness in Saudi society by pushing for greater equality and work to reduce discrimination on the grounds of gender, nationality, religion and belief.

Elections

Political participation in Saudi Arabia is limited. Municipal council elections were last held in September 2011. Shortly afterwards, the King issued a decree enabling women to participate on the next occasion in 2015. This is a significant development. The UK will continue to encourage and support further reforms, including measures currently under consideration, to increase the authority of the municipal councils.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Public protest is illegal in Saudi Arabia, although we have seen a number of demonstrations recently in both Eastern Province and other areas of the country. Several people were killed on both sides when demonstrations turned violent between members of the Shia community and the security forces in the Eastern Province. Independent and reliable sources are limited and British Embassy officials do not have unrestricted access to the Eastern Province and those involved in the unrest. However, our assessment of the information available is that the Saudi response has been proportionate thus far.

Social media continue to provide the main forum for debate in Saudi Arabia. They are not generally a tool for activism on the street, however, and are in the main uncensored, if not unmonitored. The Saudi Justice Minister, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulkareem al-Issa, publicly said in April that he welcomed diverse views, but not hate speech. However, he also warned that people who express views that undermine national unity and create political upheaval will be dealt with according to Islamic Law. The Saudi Arabian government has a restrictive policy for freedom of expression online where it concerns Islam. Hamza Kashgari, a 23-year-old Saudi national, was arrested and detained on 12 February following comments he made on Twitter about the Prophet Mohammed.

The Prime Minister and our Ambassador have raised the issue of unrest in the Eastern Province with the Saudi Arabian government. When the Prime Minister discussed the matter with the late Crown Prince Nayif during his visit in January, he acknowledged the restraint shown by the security forces in managing demonstrations. In addition, the various British military teams delivering training to the Ministry of Interior and the Saudi Arabian National Guard cover human rights issues, stressing the need to respect international standards of law enforcement and helping to maintain stability on the ground.

Human rights defenders

Several human rights defenders came to the attention of the Saudi authorities and the media in 2012. Mohammed al-Bajadi was charged with forming an unlicensed human rights association, damaging Saudi Arabia's reputation, questioning the independence of the judiciary, encouraging demonstrations and owning illegal books. He was jailed for four years, with a subsequent five-year travel ban. It is alleged that he was denied legal representation during his trial. He went on hunger strike while in detention. Mohammed al-Qahtani and Abdullah al-Hamid, founders of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, are currently on trial for undermining national unity, breaking allegiance to the ruler and operating an unlicensed human rights organisation. Human rights activists in Saudi Arabia have also reportedly been prevented from leaving the country to participate in conferences on human rights. Some have asked that the UK does not involve itself in their activities because they believe it undermines their credibility in the country.

Access to justice and the rule of law

Court proceedings in Saudi Arabia do not comply with international standards. There are signs, however, that trials are becoming more transparent and access is now given to media for some trials. Efforts to reform the justice system continue with the approval of a new central training institute for the judiciary. Changes have also been made to the organisational structure of the system, new court houses are being built and better IT is being installed. Nevertheless, the legal system remains Sharia-based and suffers from delays in bringing defendants to court in a timely manner, with reports of many individuals detained for years without trial. There are no public inquiries, inquests into unnatural deaths, or mechanisms for oversight of the judiciary. We will be aiming for closer cooperation on justice matters in 2013.

Death penalty

There were 75 executions in 2012, a similar figure to 2011. Saudi Arabia is one of only four countries that carry out executions in public by beheading (the others are Iran, North Korea and Somalia). The principle of the death penalty remains enshrined in Saudi Sharia Law. The Saudi authorities' position remains governed by an adherence to their understanding of the Law and there appears to be no prospect of imminent abolition. But the Saudi Arabian government, including the King, regularly encourage families to show clemency by waiving their right to have the killer of a relative executed. We lobbied the Saudi Arabian government bilaterally and through the EU for clemency on behalf of Rizana Nafeek, a Sri Lankan maid convicted of murdering a four-month-old baby under her care in 2005, allegedly at the age of 17. Miss Nafeek was later executed on 9 January 2013. Mr Burt, the FCO Minister with responsibility for Saudi Arabia, condemned the execution as cruel and inhuman. We will continue in 2013 to press for an application of EU minimum standards on the death penalty.

Torture

Allegations of torture continued to be heard, in particular from political activists accused of terrorist offences. Protesters outside the Saudi Human Rights Commission in Riyadh in September called for the release of jailed relatives, alleging that they were being tortured. We judge the allegations, by virtue of their frequency and the variety of sources, to be credible and it would appear that the Saudi authorities attach some credence to the

allegations, because the Public Prosecution Office, part of the Ministry of Interior, has been ordered to monitor and inspect prisons. Dr Mufleh al-Qahtani, President of the National Society of Human Rights, told Mr Burt that he and representatives had visited prisons, including some in the Eastern Province, with the approval of the Ministry of Interior, and found no evidence of torture. The Ministry of Interior's Modernisation Programme, which aims to embed better human rights and governance structures across the Ministry and subsidiary bodies, is an opportunity to make progress on this issue. Despite the efforts made to date by the government to address concerns about torture, more needs to be done. The creation of a truly independent body which reports on conditions for, and treatment of, those in prison and other detention facilities would be a significant step towards increasing transparency and accountability in the prison system.

Freedom of religion or belief

Freedom of religion or belief is severely restricted in Saudi Arabia. The public practice of faith by non-Muslims is strictly prohibited. The Grand Mufti's comment early in the year that all churches on the Arabian Peninsula should be destroyed demonstrated the strength of feeling in some quarters regarding reform on this issue, although his view is not the official policy of the Saudi Arabian government. Shia Muslims, who make up about 10% of the population (and 30% of the population in the Eastern Province), are also subject to discrimination because civic and religious freedoms, such as the building of mosques, are restricted. Mr Burt raised concerns about freedom of religion and belief, particularly for migrant workers, with Dr Mufleh al-Qahtani, President of the National Society of Human Rights, when he visited Riyadh in May. Dr al-Qahtani said that foreign workers were free to practise their religion in their own homes or compounds, but the time was not right to push for more freedoms: Saudi society was not yet ready to accept religions other than Islam in the Kingdom. A positive development was the reform of the Commission for Virtue and Prevention of Vice (the Religious Police) under its new head, Sheikh Abdulatif al-Sheikh. In November, he announced new limitations on the commission's power removing its authority to arrest, conduct interrogations and attend court hearings. We will continue to discuss the options for increasing freedom of religion in 2013.

Women's rights

Saudi Arabia was ranked 131st out of 135 countries in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index in 2012. The index benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health criteria, and provides country rankings that allow for effective comparisons across regions and income groups. The rights of women in Saudi Arabia are principally governed by a guardianship system under which women's freedom to participate in society is severely restricted. This year a number of reforms were implemented. The government is committed to expanding employment opportunities for women, and the number of women in work rose in 2012. The requirements for a woman to have the consent of her guardian to take up employment and to have a representative to conduct business were also removed, but these advances were offset by a decree by the Labour Ministry reinstating strict gender segregation provisions which had been removed when the Labour Law was changed in 2005. Women were given freedom of movement within the Gulf Cooperation Council States for the first time in 2012, although there were credible reports that guardians were automatically being text-messaged whenever female dependents left the country. The text alerts form part of the e-Border system introduced by the Saudi

authorities last year and had previously been received only if a male guardian opted into the scheme.

UK ministers and officials engaged with their Saudi counterparts on women's rights on a number of occasions, most visibly during the Prime Minister's visit to Jeddah in November. There he met a group of female students who took the view that cultural sensitivities about gender should continue to be respected because they were confident that gradual progress was being made towards liberalisation. This may be true. However, some of the negative comments on Twitter about the meeting, including suggestions that the women meeting the Prime Minister had brought shame to their families, that his visit was immoral, and that this was the beginning of a Saudi red-light district, suggest that the road to reform will continue to be challenging.

Migrant workers

There are an estimated eight million foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, many of whom are treated poorly and given limited rights. A sponsorship system governs work contracts, salary, visas, vacations and repatriation for foreign workers. It is common for passports to be confiscated by employers, restricting free movement. A large proportion of migrant workers are non-Muslims and their right to practise their religion is severely constrained. We are also concerned about the announcement on 10 December by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs banning expatriate organisations and associations on the grounds that they "violated the rules and objectives of diplomatic missions". The Saudi authorities recognise that many foreign workers are the victims of extortion by their sponsors. The National Society of Human Rights' set of proposals for reform of the sponsorship system is currently awaiting consideration by the Council of Ministers.

Children's rights

There is no age of legal responsibility in Saudi Arabia. Adulthood is deemed to begin at the onset of puberty. This has implications for the trials of children as adults, including for crimes which carry the death penalty. It also gives legitimacy to the concept of child marriage, which, based on anecdotal evidence, is fairly common. We await a decision from the Ministry of Justice to put legislation before the Cabinet on this. In May 2011, the Shura Council voted, in a non-binding resolution, for a minimum age for girls to marry at 17.

Somalia

The human rights situation in Somalia remains poor, although there have been considerable political and security changes during 2012. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), with support from the Somali National Security Forces (SNSF), gained significant territory from the al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group al-Shabaab, who until recently controlled much of the southern area of Somalia. This has improved humanitarian access, but the humanitarian crisis remains dire and NGOs continue to experience difficulties gaining access to much of Southern Somalia.

The political landscape has changed since the end of the Transitional Federal Government on 20 August. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected on 10 September and a new Prime Minister and 10-member cabinet appointed. The new President is committed to improving security and justice in Somalia, including the protection of human rights. This greater political commitment is encouraging, but the government faces many of the same capacity problems as its predecessors. Life for the majority of Somalis has not changed and their human rights remain severely curtailed.

The UK has played a prominent role in mobilising international support for Somalia, most notably at the London Conference on Somalia on 23 February, which recognised the need to put human rights at the heart of the peace process. This was followed in March by a UN Human Rights Council resolution, sponsored jointly by the UK and Somalia, welcoming the conference, and in particular the communiqué language on human rights, and calling for improved UN support for efforts to end human rights abuses and combat impunity in Somalia. The UN Human Rights Council passed two further resolutions on Somalia in 2012: one in June extending the mandate of the Independent Expert and one in September encouraging the new government of Somalia to work with the Independent Expert to develop a human rights post-transition roadmap. On 26 September, the Foreign Secretary attended a mini-summit for Somalia at the UN General Assembly, where he announced that the UK would provide £10 million to support the immediate needs of the new government.

We will continue to support Somalia in 2013 by co-hosting a second conference on Somalia in May to coordinate international efforts to improve security and justice, and advance political reconciliation, public financial management and economic recovery.

In line with the Foreign Secretary's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, we aim to put the issue of sexual violence in conflict on the political agenda in Somalia during 2013. As the security situation improves over the coming year, we hope also to see greater access for humanitarian relief organisations and human rights monitoring in the country.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Somalia has become one of the most dangerous countries in the world in which to be a journalist. In 2012, 18 media workers were killed. There are reports of violence, threats and intimidation against other journalists. In most cases there has been little progress in finding or prosecuting those responsible. It is widely thought that al-Shabaab is behind many of the attacks, although clan disputes and political grievances have also been cited. The new government has given a commitment to end the culture of impunity, but the Somali security

and justice system lacks the capacity to investigate cases competently or to prosecute the offenders. Many journalists have fled the country, and many that remain self-censor in order to avoid being targeted, reducing the availability of independent and unbiased information to the Somali people. The new President recognises the need to tackle this issue. Both the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Africa have publicly condemned the persecution of journalists and strongly encouraged the Somali authorities to bring to justice those who are responsible.

Access to justice and the rule of law

Access to justice remains limited in Somalia. Law enforcement is largely conducted at local and clan level and is a mixture of three tiers of justice: jurisprudence inherited from colonial times, Sharia Law and clan or customary law. There is minimal oversight from the state. There are a few state courts in Mogadishu but the underlying legal framework is inadequate. There have been continued reports of serious abuses in al-Shabaab-controlled areas including summary executions, unlawful arrest, flogging, stoning and amputation. Gains by AMISOM and the SNSF have reduced the area controlled by al-Shabaab, but the new government has yet to provide viable policing and justice systems in their place. Embedding an effective system of justice across the country is one of the President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's top priorities. DFID has been working through the Core State Functions programme to train, equip and deploy police officers, provide courts with trained prosecutors and defence lawyers and build a prison facility in Mogadishu. This is part of a £38 million programme to strengthen Somali justice institutions, which will run to 2015.

Conflict and protection of civilians

As al-Shabaab has lost territory to AMISOM and SNSF, they have increasingly reverted to terror tactics, notably the bomb attack on the President on 12 September, two days after his election. There are reports that they are also intimidating and terrorising populations close to al-Shabaab strongholds and in newly liberated areas.

The conflict, continued insecurity and extreme weather patterns have combined to produce a humanitarian crisis, with over two million people in need of urgent assistance. While the situation has improved significantly since the famine of 2011, malnutrition rates remain high, with an estimated 236,000 acutely malnourished children in the south and chronic food insecurity across the country. This has led to significant levels of displacement, with 1.36 million internally displaced people and 1 million Somali refugees across the Horn of Africa, including some 500,000 Somali refugees living in Kenya. Congestion in refugee camps across the region means that vulnerable groups such as women and unaccompanied children have little protection, and women suffer high levels of gender-based violence.

Somalia is a dangerous country for aid agencies to work in, with al-Shabaab still exercising control over large areas of south Somalia where aid workers are frequently kidnapped. This makes aid delivery impossible in parts of the south. Al-Shabaab has committed serious human rights abuses against the Somali population, including targeted killings, executions and torture. In areas that they control, they also impose harsh restrictions on freedom of movement and other basic rights.

Both sides in the conflict have been responsible for civilian casualties. AMISOM troops have had training on international humanitarian law, which included in particular the need to protect civilians. On 6 August, the UN and the transitional government signed an action plan committing the Somali National Armed Forces, allied militia and military groups under its control to end the killing and maiming of children and to uphold international law and safeguard the rights of citizens in Somalia. This followed the signing by the transitional government and the UN in July of the first action plan, to end the recruitment and use of children by the Somali National Armed Forces.

Women's rights

Somalia is one of the worst countries in the world to be a woman. Female genital mutilation is almost universal, domestic violence is commonplace and there are many cases of rape and sexual violence (with 70% of those reported occurring among internally displaced populations). The societal stigma attached to sexual violence and rape prevents many women from reporting these crimes. Lack of access, statistics and monitoring data also make it difficult for the international community to establish the full extent of the problem. Most cases which are reported are dealt with under clan or Sharia Law rather than in the state courts. Women face widespread discrimination and are routinely excluded from educational and economic opportunities. There were, however, small signs of improvement in 2012. Women comprise 13% of MPs in the new parliament. Fawzia Yusuf H Adam was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, becoming one of two women in the 10-member cabinet. The President is committed to improving women's rights in Somalia. But this new level of representation will need to translate into concrete action to have any real impact on the lives of women across the country. The Foreign Secretary's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative will have particular relevance to women in Somalia.

Piracy

Thanks to effective countermeasures, there was a decline in the number of successful pirate attacks in 2012 compared to 2011. However, this trend is reversible and piracy continues to be a major problem, threatening global maritime trade and involving increasing levels of violence. The average length of time for which a hostage is detained is currently 453 days. The UK is a major contributor to international measures against piracy, including providing support for naval operations off the coast of Somalia.

Long-term instability, lawlessness and lack of effective governance in the Somali region all encourage piracy, which in turn undermines development efforts in Somalia. The UK is working with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Development Programme (UNDP) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) to tackle the problem at source, including work on development with local coastal communities. Together with the UNODC, we are also undertaking project work on prisons, prosecutions and transfer agreements. We continue to invest in Somalia, and the region, to support the prosecution and incarceration of pirates in conditions that meet international standards. This feeds into wider UK efforts to improve access to justice and the rule of law in Somalia.

South Sudan

In 2012, the human rights situation in South Sudan deteriorated in some respects and the government was slow in addressing areas of concern. This was partly the result of a challenging political and economic environment – in particular, tensions with Sudan, which saw an increase in military action across the border in March. The dispute led to a shutdown in oil production, resulting in the loss of the majority of government revenue. The subsequent austerity measures reduced the resources available to address areas of human rights concerns, pushing many further down the political agenda. Delays to the planned constitutional review and to some important pieces of legislation – including laws on the media – hindered progress in securing legal safeguards for rights such as freedom of expression. The actions of both the national security forces and tribal militias during recurring inter-communal conflict, with instances of civilians being raped, tortured and killed, large-scale displacements, arbitrary arrests and summary executions, were a major area of concern.

We pressed hard for South Sudan to ratify or accede to regional and international human rights instruments, but progress was undermined by the country's immediate economic and political difficulties and by the slow pace of domestic legislation. We supported the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in its mandate to monitor, investigate and verify reports of human rights violations and helped the government develop its capacity to address these. We supported mediation efforts between Sudan and South Sudan to reach agreement on outstanding issues in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. In September, the two governments signed a series of cooperation agreements, including one which enshrined the "four freedoms" principle, granting nationals the freedom to reside, move, acquire and dispose of property and undertake economic activities in both states. We also worked with the South Sudan government to address a number of specific human rights issues, including the continued use of the death penalty and the arbitrary arrest and detention of journalists and political commentators.

If inter-communal violence continues in 2013, it will pose a continued risk of human rights violations and abuses, particularly violence against civilians. Sustained failure to implement the agreements with Sudan will also prevent progress on human rights, as the conflict will continue to divert government resources and attention, as seen in 2012. If the agreements are implemented, however, we anticipate a heightened focus by the government of South Sudan on human rights, driven by the rise in national and international awareness of the violations and abuses which have taken place, and increasing public discontent at the perceived lack of government action to investigate and prosecute those responsible.

The UK will therefore continue to press South Sudan to implement the cooperation agreements and to resolve outstanding areas of disagreement with Sudan. It is disappointing that this process stalled at the end of 2012, and we have been urging both states to continue to make full use of African Union assistance in 2013, including at the African Union Summit in January 2013. We will also focus on the Foreign Secretary's Preventing Sexual Violence in conflict Initiative. Work will begin shortly on identifying areas which would benefit from the deployment of experts, in coordination with the UN. We will

also monitor how South Sudan follows up in practice its vote at the UN General Assembly in favour of a global moratorium on use of the death penalty.

Freedom of expression and assembly

In December, violence broke out when a group of civilians in Wau protested against the relocation of the county headquarters. The South Sudanese armed forces were brought in to police the demonstration. Unable to control the crowd, they opened fire, reportedly killing 10 protesters. The UK has pressed the government and UNMISS to investigate the incident with a view to learning lessons about managing public order at demonstrations in future. We have also urged the government to pass proposed media legislation as soon as possible to provide legal protection of freedom of expression for civilians and journalists.

On 5 December, Isaiah Diing Abraham, a political commentator and senior officer with the Employees Justice Chamber, was murdered at his home in Juba. Mr Abraham had recently written articles critical of the government, including of its decision to sign the cooperation agreements with Somalia in September. Government security agents were suspected of being behind the killing. The government pledged to carry out a full investigation and has formed an inquiry team, which includes support from the US Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Human rights defenders

In July, it was reported that Deng Athuai Mawiir, an anti-corruption activist who played a role in demanding action from the government of South Sudan on corruption, was kidnapped, assaulted and interrogated by unidentified security personnel. The UK has pressed strongly for an investigation by government authorities into the incident, but his attackers have yet to be identified.

Access to justice and the rule of law

Both detentions without trial and arbitrary arrests increased in 2012. The situation was made worse by weaknesses in the judicial system. Most detainees do not have access to legal representation and are not aware of their rights. Inadequate training and poor levels of English, the official language of South Sudan, mean many police officers do not fully understand the law. Junior officers are thought to be undertaking arrests without authority. There is little accountability when abuses take place. Current UK-funded projects in the security and justice sectors will continue to 2015. Our Safety and Access to Justice Programme will contribute towards more professional and accountable policing. A new Justice Programme currently being designed will support the delivery of justice at the community level, with a specific focus on access to justice for women. In addition, the UK is leading international efforts on accountability and tackling corruption in South Sudan by participation in a high-level dialogue with the government of South Sudan and providing technical support for the South Sudan Anti-Corruption Commission to enhance its ability to fulfil its mandate.

Death penalty

South Sudan maintained the death penalty on secession from Sudan and has carried out eight executions since independence. The constitutional review process would have provided an important opportunity for the government to seek informed discussion on its continued use, but this has been delayed. Human Rights Watch reported in September that

more than 200 prisoners are currently on death row. Due to limitations in the justice system many did not have access to any form of legal representation, depriving them of the ability to defend themselves or appeal against their sentences. The Catholic Church, a powerful source of advocacy in South Sudan, has been vocal in its support for abolition of the death penalty.

We voiced UK opposition to the death penalty with senior government ministers, highlighting the lack of convincing evidence of its effectiveness as a deterrent. On 20 December, South Sudan voted for a UN resolution calling for a global moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty. The UK will monitor how this policy is reflected in practice, and urge South Sudan to follow through by abolishing the death penalty completely.

Torture

South Sudanese security forces committed serious human rights violations during a recent civilian disarmament campaign in Jonglei State, including the use of torture and rape. The UK pressed for action from the government. Some soldiers have since been arrested and charged. The UK is now calling for prompt prosecution of those involved and for the local community to be told that this has happened. We support the government's decision to suspend the disarmament programme, which will help to prevent the exacerbation of community grievances and avoid increasing their vulnerability at a time of heightened tension.

To prevent further violations the government has committed to measures to improve the transparency and accountability of the army and its respect for human rights. The UK is providing support through a Security Sector Development and Defence Transformation Programme.

Conflict and protection of civilians

Inter-communal violence in Jonglei State is estimated to have killed over 1,000 people since late 2011. The government initiated a peace process, which culminated in a Jonglei State Peace Conference in May, the launch of an Investigations Committee (though little progress has been made on this) and a civilian disarmament campaign. The disarmament campaign brought security improvements to some local communities but was also associated with serious human rights violations, including the incidents of rape and torture by the army detailed above. Médecins Sans Frontières released a report in November on the extent of civilian casualties and internal displacement in Jonglei. It singled out the increased targeting of women and children as a particular cause for concern.

Primary responsibility for the protection of civilians lies with the government of South Sudan. UNMISS has been mandated to help build the capacity of the South Sudanese security forces to do this. UNMISS has performed well in providing support to the work of the President's Committee for Peace in Jonglei state, and in broader civil society peacebuilding efforts.

It was therefore particularly disappointing that the government of South Sudan chose to expel an UNMISS Human Rights Officer in October. The UK expressed its concern to the government at the time about the message this sends about the seriousness of their

commitment to human rights, including international monitoring. It is vital that human rights staff in UNMISS are able to carry out their work freely, in accordance with their mandate and without fear of expulsion.

Women's rights

Violence against women peaked during the inter-ethnic fighting in Jonglei State. Many were forced to leave their homes, often moving to temporary shelter or refugee camps, which offered little protection against rape and other acts of violence. The rule of law is weak and the majority of cases were dealt with using customary law, which discriminates against women. Women now hold 26.5% of seats in the National Legislative Assembly and constitute 12% of heads of ministries, departments and agencies, but are rarely visible as decision-makers.

Efforts by the government to increase gender equality meet challenges. The Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare lacks the resources to tackle harmful traditional and cultural practices, division of labour by gender, lack of awareness about human rights and violence. We will support the ministry's efforts to develop gender policies and legislation, including a domestic violence bill. The government of South Sudan recognises that poor discipline and limited organisational capacity have resulted in rape and other gender-based violence by state security personnel and is currently taking steps to tackle this.

Improving and embedding women's rights is central to the UK development effort in South Sudan. Our Basic Services Fund, Health Pooled Fund and Safety and Access to Justice Programme all support these aims. We are working with UNMISS, the UN Population Fund and UN Women to identify where the UK could most effectively increase capacity to support and protect survivors of sexual violence through the Foreign Secretary's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. DFID is also developing an extensive girls' education programme to accelerate the enrolment of girls, their retention and the completion of their studies at primary and secondary school. Up to 200,000 girls would benefit.

Constitutional review

Members of the National Constitutional Review Commission were mandated on 9 January, in accordance with the transitional constitution, to consult on and draft a new constitution for South Sudan. However, delays due to disagreements over membership meant that the Commission did not complete its work, and its mandate has now been extended to 09 January 2015. The UK welcomes this extension and the efforts by the National Constitutional Review Commission, its supporters and the government to ensure that the review process is comprehensive and transparent, and includes public consultation.

Sri Lanka

The human rights situation in Sri Lanka in 2012 remained of serious concern, with a number of negative developments, including with regard to freedom of expression and media and judicial independence. Further progress was made on reintegration of ex-combatants and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs). There continued to be reports of further abductions and disappearances, although the number reduced from spring 2012 onwards compared to 2011 levels. There were a number of reported instances of intimidation of human rights defenders, including those attending the March Human Rights Council (HRC), members of the legal profession and the media.

The UK focused on helping Sri Lanka to address human rights challenges, including those resulting from the 30-year conflict. In January, Minister Alistair Burt issued a written ministerial statement on the 2011 Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) report, urging implementation of the recommendations and calling for a credible, independent investigation into alleged violations of international humanitarian law. In March, the UK co-sponsored an HRC resolution calling for implementation of LLRC recommendations and further action on reconciliation and alleged violations of international law. The Prime Minister reiterated the importance of accountability and reconciliation in a meeting with the Sri Lankan President in May. The UK also participated in Sri Lanka's Universal Periodic Review in November. During 2012, British High Commission staff visited all nine Sri Lankan provinces to ensure an understanding of the situation on the ground across the country. The UK also funded several projects addressing issues such as language rights, women's rights and police reform.

A key focus in 2013 will be follow-up to the 2012 HRC Resolution on Sri Lanka, including implementation of the LLRC recommendations. Universal Periodic Review follow-up will also be important. We will do all we can to encourage Sri Lanka to demonstrate adherence to Commonwealth values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, particularly ahead of Sri Lanka's hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in November.

Access to justice and the rule of law

Rule of law issues in Sri Lanka came under the spotlight in 2012. Challenges included political interference in law enforcement, intimidation of legal professionals and access to justice. Long-term detention without charge persists under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Justice can be slow, with cases taking months or even years to come to trial. Of particular concern is the case of British citizen Khuram Shaikh, who was murdered on 25 December 2011. The suspects in this case were not brought to trial in 2012, despite early arrests and clear evidence.

In October, the Secretary of the Judicial Service Commission was hospitalised following an attack by unidentified armed men in broad daylight in outer Colombo. He had previously been criticised in the state-owned media for, among other things, issuing a statement alleging attempts to interfere with the independence of the judiciary. Together with EU partners, our High Commission in Colombo raised serious concerns with the Sri Lankan authorities and pressed for an investigation into the incident.

A riot at Colombo's Welikada Prison on 9 November resulted in the death of 27 inmates. Some media and opposition members alleged that 11 of the dead inmates were individually executed several hours after the situation had been brought under control. Domestic investigations are under way.

The government also announced moves to impeach the Chief Justice, accusing her of corruption and other misdeeds. The impeachment process followed a number of Supreme Court rulings against the government.

On 15 November, the UN Special Rapporteur on Independence of Judges and Lawyers released a statement criticising the impeachment, stating that "The misuse of disciplinary proceedings as a reprisals mechanism against independent judges is unacceptable." The Commonwealth Secretary-General also expressed concern at the impeachment process.

Death penalty

Sri Lanka has maintained a *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty since 1976, but on 18 December abstained in a UN General Assembly vote calling for its abolition, having previously voted in favour. The UK and EU expressed concern to the Sri Lankan Ministry of External Affairs.

Minority rights

The Sri Lankan government and Tamil National Alliance (TNA) failed to reach consensus on addressing key Tamil minority concerns. The Sri Lankan government reported that recruitment of Tamil-speaking police increased by 427 to 1,216 in 2012. In November, a dedicated hotline was established for complaints on language rights violations. The UK funded Tamil language training for police, and a project supporting implementation of Sri Lanka's tri-lingualism policy.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

Homosexuality remains illegal under Sri Lankan law. The British High Commission supported lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights activists in raising concerns over harassment.

Elections

Elections for three of Sri Lanka's nine provinces were held on 9 September. The governing United Peoples' Freedom Alliance was elected as the largest party in all three provinces. The UK helped to fund election monitoring, and encouraged all sides to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections. Local observers People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) said that despite some improvements, elections did not meet criteria for a free and fair poll. Irregularities cited by PAFFREL included "the manner in which the government authorities acted in the pre-election period ...There was large-scale abuse of government vehicles and state property for election campaigning purposes and public announcements of new recruitments to the public service in the provinces in which the elections were taking place." The Sri Lankan President announced that long-postponed elections for the predominantly Tamil Northern Province would be held in September 2013.

Conflict and protection of civilians

Most of the 12,000 ex-combatants detained in 2009 have now been released. In 2011–12 the UK contributed £650,000 to support their reintegration into society. At the end of 2012, 775 ex-combatants remained in custody in "rehabilitation centres" and several hundred more were in prison awaiting prosecution.

Despite some improvements, the situation in the north remained problematic. Although reduced since 2009, the military presence in the Vanni region in particular remained heavy. The military continued to be involved in numerous civil functions despite the establishment and functioning of civilian authorities. There were reports throughout the year of harassment of released ex-combatants. In September, Sri Lanka closed down its largest camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Menik Farm. The UN and international donors welcomed the closure, but raised public concerns over inadequate provision for 110 relocated families. The process for receiving compensation for military-occupied land remained unclear. It is estimated that 115,000 IDPs remained at the end of 2012 – many residing with host families and in protracted displacement. Aid agencies acknowledged Sri Lanka's progress in de-mining former conflict areas, enabling large numbers of IDPs to return to their lands. The Department for International Development (DFID) continued its £3 million de-mining support.

The UK's Channel 4 aired a further documentary entitled "Sri Lanka's Killing Fields: War Crimes Unpunished" highlighting four cases which it alleged constituted evidence of war crimes. Following this, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Alistair Burt called for Sri Lanka to undertake an independent, credible and thorough investigation into alleged war crimes. In July, Sri Lanka published an Action Plan for implementation of the LLRC recommendations, covering half of the original recommendations, with deadlines for implementation from early 2013. During a Westminster Hall Debate earlier in 2012, Mr Burt said that implementation of the LLRC recommendations would be the real test of Sri Lanka's progress since the end of the war. The UK encouraged the Sri Lankan government to implement the Action Plan and to take the additional steps called for in the March 2012 HRC Resolution.

Women's rights

In 2012, Sri Lanka slipped down to 39 in the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index, from its 2011 ranking of 31. This marks a steady decline over the past five years, from being placed 12 in 2008.

Female participation in government remained low, with only 13 female parliamentarians out of 225.

Women's rights in the north and the east of the country remained a concern. Activists focused on issues concerning over 90,000 war widows' rights and economic empowerment. As part of our ongoing dialogue with the Sri Lankan government on human rights, we raised concerns about specific reports of sexual violence.

In November, our High Commission in Colombo marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 16 Days of Activism, and Human Rights Day with

public statements, newspaper articles by activists, and a workshop for staff. The UK also funded two local partners working to tackle rape, domestic violence and forced marriage.

Children's rights

In December, the United Nations Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict removed Sri Lanka from its agenda. The decision came following significant progress in rehabilitation and reintegration of former child combatants. Work remains to be done with children affected by conflict, including reuniting displaced children with their families.

Despite efforts to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, activists claimed that child abuse and child labour continued. The past year has seen a spate of high-profile child abuse incidents. The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission said that 2,500 child abuse cases were reported between 1 January 2010 and 1 July 2012.

Human rights defenders

Serious human rights violations including intimidation of human rights defenders continued in 2012. Those with dissenting views and working with international mechanisms were often portrayed as "traitors", including through poster campaigns and in state-owned media. Some human rights defenders also received death threats. During the March Human Rights Council session in Geneva, there were serious and credible accusations that the Sri Lankan delegation had been harassing and intimidating human rights defenders, and a government minister threatened to "break the limbs" of those who betrayed the country. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned that there should be no reprisals against human rights defenders.

Reports of enforced disappearances continued in 2012. Victims came from a range of ethnic groups and included human rights workers as well as businessmen and alleged criminals. Campaigners blamed pro-government groups and security forces. Leaders of the new Frontline Socialist Party were abducted by an unidentified group on 7 April and subsequently released. They alleged government responsibility. In August, there was an attempt to abduct a journalist in Colombo. Local civil society and family members of those disappeared between the 1980s and 2009 from across the country held an event to commemorate the International Day against Disappearances on 30 August.

No conclusive investigations into past incidents took place. There was no progress in the investigation into the 2011 disappearance of campaigners Lalith Kumar Weeraraj and Kugan Murugan in Jaffna.

Freedom of expression and assembly

There were no reported killings of journalists in 2012, in contrast to previous years. There was one attempted abduction and a number of other attacks. Sri Lanka ranked 162 of 179 countries in the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index for 2012. There were no conclusive investigations into past incidents, including the 2009 murder of *Sunday Leader* Editor Lasantha Wickremetunga and the 2010 disappearance of cartoonist Prageeth Ekneligoda. British High Commission staff attended a court hearing in the Ekneligoda case at which former Attorney General Mohan Peiris gave evidence.

In July, police closed the offices of two pro-opposition websites, confiscated computers and documents and arrested nine workers who were subsequently released. In July, the government also announced the imposition of a registration fee for all newscasting websites. Two newspaper reporters from the north said they had received death threats for their reporting of a controversial protest. Media alleged that the Sri Lankan Defence Secretary threatened the editor of a Sunday newspaper during a telephone interview. In December, a pro-opposition journalist was allegedly detained for 13 hours without a stated reason or access to a lawyer.

Restrictions on free assembly continued through 2012. In Colombo, police used tear gas and water cannon to break up February protests over fuel price increases, and in Chilaw police killed a protester by shooting him in the head. On 15 June, 10 men armed with machine guns attacked an opposition JVP (People's Liberation Front) party rally in Hambantota, killing two people. The organisers blamed pro-government elements. On a number of occasions police sought court orders to prevent demonstrations. In December, a number of young people, including Jaffna University students, were detained under the PTA following clashes related to student remembrance events coinciding with LTTE (Tamil Tiger) Martyrs' day and the Hindu festival of Karthikai Vilakkeedu. European Union Heads of Mission in Colombo publicly raised concerns in a statement on 5 December. They called on authorities to ensure that all citizens were able to exercise their fundamental rights without impediment. At Sri Lanka's Universal Periodic Review, the UK called on Sri Lanka to ensure a climate in which all citizens were able freely to express their opinions and beliefs, without fear of reprisal or retribution, and recommended that the government extend an invitation to the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression. Sri Lanka did not accept this recommendation.

Freedom of religion or belief

Commentators observed an increase in religiously motivated violence in 2012. During the year, 52 incidents of violence and intimidation against Protestant Christian churches were documented. Violence against Muslim places of worship also increased. A mob led by Buddhist monks attacked a mosque in the city of Dambulla, which they claimed (along with a Hindu shrine) was built on sacred Buddhist ground and needed to be relocated. No arrests were made and tensions between religious communities continued. A nationalist group called the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist army) increased campaigns against religious minorities.

Torture

Despite the prioritisation of torture prevention in the 2011 National Human Rights Action Plan, there was no change in laws in 2012 to give effect to recommendations, and reports of torture continued.

On 15 April, a key witness in a fundamental rights case that had been filed against a police officer died in custody following his arrest. According to the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), the man was illegally arrested and later extrajudicially killed by police officers. Several officers from the station were transferred, but the case remained open.

The AHRC reported seven incidents of torture between July and September, including one death. A joint military and police operation to rescue three prison officials taken hostage by protesting prisoners in June resulted in serious injuries to three prisoners, two of whom subsequently died. Civil society and Tamil political parties alleged excessive use of force.

Sri Lanka's Universal Periodic Review, and working with the UN

Sri Lanka's Universal Periodic Review was held on 1 November. A record 98 countries spoke in the debate. Key issues raised related to protection of human rights defenders, freedom of expression, disappearances, women's rights, accountability for violations in the conflict, and independence of the judiciary.

The UK welcomed the end of war and terrorism, but expressed concern about attacks on and intimidation of journalists, human rights defenders and legal professionals; we also urged the government to combat impunity and to implement the LLRC recommendations. UK recommendations included calls for full and transparent investigations into alleged grave breaches of international law during the war; a climate in which all citizens could express their opinions without fear; and the issuing of an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression.

Sri Lanka received a total of 210 recommendations during the Universal Periodic Review. Of these, 110 recommendations, including the UK's first recommendation on investigating alleged violations of international law, were accepted. The second recommendation by the UK, to invite the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression and ensure a climate in which all citizens can freely express their opinions and beliefs without fear of reprisal and retribution, was rejected. There are six outstanding requests from UN Special Rapporteurs to visit Sri Lanka.

Sudan

Overall, the human rights situation in Sudan deteriorated in 2012, including new restrictions on civil and political rights. The ongoing conflict in Darfur and the border areas with South Sudan led to a worsening humanitarian situation, with continued reports of indiscriminate military tactics employed by the Sudanese Armed Forces leading to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people within Sudan and into South Sudan. The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported at the end of 2012 that 695,000 people were thought to have been affected by the conflict. A further 240,000 refugees are estimated to have fled to South Sudan and Ethiopia. Since 2009, the government has placed severe restrictions on the operations of international NGOs, particularly those working on protection issues. These restrictions were tightened in June when Sudan's Humanitarian Affairs Commission closed down the activities of a number of organisations in the east of Sudan, reflecting a lack of serious commitment by the government to improve the human rights situation. The government showed some willingness to cooperate with the newly appointed UN Independent Expert on Human Rights when he visited in June, although he was not permitted to travel to areas of conflict. The government's Advisory Council on Human Rights has agreed to a more formalised dialogue with European Union missions in Sudan.

The UK's human rights objectives in 2012 focused on resolving conflict (through significant support to the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel), securing humanitarian access in conflict areas, and supporting civil and political freedoms. Although there was some progress in September towards resolving disagreements between Sudan and South Sudan, this had not translated into progress on human rights in the border areas by the end of the year. The government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) showed no real willingness to come to the negotiating table. This was a major obstacle to progress on humanitarian access and the protection of civilians in South Kordofan and Blue Nile.

In 2013, the UK will continue to focus on conflict resolution and humanitarian access as priorities for our work. We are supporting the implementation of existing Sudan/South Sudan agreements and the ongoing efforts to resolve outstanding areas of dispute, including on the status of Abyei. We will continue to urge the government and the SPLM-N to negotiate a political settlement and to agree access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the conflict areas. The FCO and DFID are working together to support steps towards free and fair elections in 2014 and 2015. These steps should include a transparent and participatory constitutional review process.

Elections

Sudan continues to operate under an interim national constitution drafted in 2005 as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with South Sudan. The government has committed publicly to an open constitutional review process, which would include political opposition parties and civil society organisations. However, no such process has been formally initiated and opposition parties have expressed their unwillingness to engage in it, citing a lack of trust in the ruling National Congress Party's (NCP) ability to conduct a fair process. Although the government has expressed its intention to allow civil society to participate in the

process, this was undermined in May when security services harassed an umbrella organisation of 60 civil society groups, the Sudanese Initiative for Constitution-making, threatening its closure.

In 2012, the UK funded the activities of several national and international bodies engaged in civil society-led consultations and who advocated for an open and transparent constitutional review process.

Presidential and parliamentary elections are due in 2014 and 2015. DFID is preparing a programme of support to a freer and fairer electoral process in Sudan, building on previous programmes, which – if approved – they will begin to implement in 2013. The UK continues to urge the government to embark on a process of democratic reform, including through a transparent and inclusive constitutional review process.

Freedom of expression and assembly

The ruling NCP currently dominates the political scene in Sudan. While many opposition parties are allowed to operate, they are sometimes harassed by security services, including through monitoring of their activity, arbitrary arrest of individuals and suppression of political gatherings. The government refuses to recognise the SPLM-N as a political party.

The government responded violently to protests prompted by the austerity measures in Khartoum and other urban centres over the summer, with tear gas, violence and mass detentions. Protests were policed heavily, particularly by National Intelligence and Security Service officials. Local NGOs estimated that up to 1,000 protesters were detained nationwide over the June–July period. There were also examples of targeted assaults on female protesters. Some of those who were detained reported the use of torture and ill-treatment on the part of the security services. On 31 July, events escalated when the use of disproportionate force by police against students in Darfur resulted in the killing of 12 people, some of whom were under the age of 18 years. On 16 August, President Bashir announced the release without charge of those detained during the protests. Throughout the period, UK Government officials regularly raised concerns about the government of Sudan's response to protests. The then Minister for Africa, Henry Bellingham, made a statement in June regarding the UK's concerns about the restrictions on freedom of expression and called for the release of detainees.

The 2005 Interim Constitution recognises freedom of the press, but the 2009 Press and Publication Act allows a government-appointed Press Council to prevent publication or broadcast of material it deems unsuitable. These powers were widely used in 2012. In addition, three national newspapers were closed and editions of other newspapers were routinely confiscated at the printing press. Some journalists were also banned from writing because of their previous reporting, and a prominent journalist was put on trial charged with threatening national security and was fined by the court. At the end of October, a freelance journalist, Somia Ismail Hundosa, was reportedly detained by security services and tortured for several days as a result of her reports, which were critical of the ruling regime.

Access to the Internet in Sudan is subject to government control and was restricted during protests over the summer. In 2010, the government suspended the FM broadcasting licence of the BBC World Service in Arabic and has not reversed this decision.

Human rights defenders

We have received credible reports that NGO staff and political activists were detained and interrogated by security services in 2012, particularly if they were suspected of opposition to the regime, and/or having links to the SPLM-N or to South Sudan. We have raised our concerns with the government about these incidents.

Access to justice and the rule of law

The National Security Act in Sudan gives wide discretionary powers of arrest and detention to the National Intelligence and Security Services. Arbitrary arrest is common. In addition there is a state of emergency in 5 out of Sudan's 17 states, which enables the government to suspend the constitution and gives the President the right to establish special courts to handle criminal and terrorist cases.

The DFID Safety and Access to Justice Programme in Sudan embeds promotion of human rights principles in its training programmes with the police and judiciary. A key theme of the programme is the promotion of the rights of women, boys and girls, for example in its support to the Family and Child Protection Units of the Sudanese Police, and to implementation of the 2010 Child Act.

At the start of the year, the government appointed an independent National Human Rights Commission, which was a key recommendation under the UN Universal Periodic Review. In 2012 and 2013, the FCO is funding a capacity-building project for Sudan's new independent Human Rights Commission working with the University of Nottingham Human Rights Law Centre. This project intends to help the commission become an effective force for the protection of human rights in Sudan.

Death penalty

The death penalty is applicable for a number of offences in Sudan, including adultery, sodomy and alleged crimes of a religious or political nature. There were reports in the media in 2012 of death penalty sentences carried out for the offences of murder and child rape. British Embassy officials raised concerns regarding several cases of death penalty sentences for the charge of adultery in 2012. The sentences were all overturned on appeal.

Torture

Though torture is prohibited by the Interim Constitution, there are widespread reports that security forces routinely carry out torture, beatings, rape and other cruel and inhumane treatment or punishments. Prison and detention centre conditions were sometimes harsh and life threatening. We were particularly concerned by the case of British national, Magdy El-Baghdady, who was held by the Sudanese authorities and reportedly mistreated during his detention from February to May 2011. At Mr Baghdady's request, we first raised this issue with the Sudanese authorities in February 2012, after the conclusion of his appeal. We requested that a prompt, impartial investigation be undertaken, and continue to press on this matter.

Conflict and protection of civilians

In July 2011, South Sudan seceded from Sudan and became independent under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. A number of issues contained within this peace agreement, including border demarcation, citizenship, oil and the status of disputed areas, remained unresolved at the start of 2012 and have been a source of tension between Sudan and South Sudan throughout the year, with outright conflict briefly breaking out in April 2012. Although Sudan and South Sudan signed a series of agreements in September and the two presidents recommitted to them at a summit in Addis in January 2013, they have yet to be implemented.

The UK Government has deep concerns about ongoing conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States. We have regularly expressed those concerns with the government and the SPLM-N, and pressed them to negotiate to agree a cessation of hostilities. The UN estimates that this conflict has now severely affected or displaced approximately 900,000 people, and predicts that food insecurity may reach crisis levels in some areas of the two states. The UK has made clear that the ongoing restrictions on humanitarian access to those in need of assistance are completely unacceptable. We also strongly condemn the use of indiscriminate tactics during this conflict, in particular the use of aerial bombardment by the Sudanese Armed Forces, which has put civilian lives at great risk. Such actions, which are likely to be violations of international humanitarian law, deserve credible and independent investigation, as the Foreign Secretary called for in June when the fighting began in Southern Kordofan. However, the ongoing fighting and the lack of access by third parties have prevented substantive progress on a credible investigation. In May, the UK played a leading role at the UN Security Council in the adoption of UNSCR 2046, which was the first time a Security Council resolution had looked to address the fighting in these two conflict areas. The UK Government provided financial and technical support to the mediation efforts of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel. The Africa Conflict Pool Programme for Sudan/South Sudan was also used to support conflict prevention and resolution and to promote good governance.

Conflict continued in Darfur despite the signature in 2011 of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD). There was some progress in implementation of this agreement – the Darfur Regional Authority was inaugurated in February and all requisite commissions and ministries were established. The All Darfur Conference for Peace and Development and a Joint Assessment of Development Needs mission were held in 2012, but further progress needs to be made in 2013 for it to be judged a success. Progress on the ground in Darfur continues to be hampered by the lack of governmental funding for implementation of the DDPD. The region has also witnessed increased insecurity as a result of the outbreak of new hostilities, which led to new displacements of civilians. Armed groups, militias and government-linked security forces were all reported to have committed violations and abuses, including the killing of civilians and sexual gender-based violence. There were also a number of kidnaps of humanitarian workers and United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) staff in Darfur in 2012. There are 3.4 million people receiving humanitarian assistance in Darfur, of whom 1.2 million are internally displaced according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

In the East of Sudan, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimate that thousands of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and Sudanese nationals rely on smugglers to transport them into, through and out of Sudan every year. Exit visa requirements from Eritrea into Sudan as well as Sudan's strict encampment policy leave asylum seekers and refugees with no feasible alternatives but to rely on smugglers to assist with such irregular movement. UNHCR estimates that approximately 3,000 persons enter the East of Sudan from Eritrea every month, of which an average of 2,000 seek asylum in the Shagarab camp. The vast majority of these seek to move on in a matter of weeks. A sophisticated network set up by smugglers enables movement of people efficiently from Eritrea through the East of Sudan to Khartoum, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel and beyond. UNHCR and IOM received a significant and increasing number of reports in 2012 of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers en route who have been subjected to kidnapping, extortion, torture and severe sexual and physical violence by criminal groups involved in the smuggling of persons. We have also received credible reports that human organ-trafficking may be taking place linked to this activity.

Freedom of religion or belief

Although the constitution provides that Sharia Law should not be applied to non-Muslims, in practice, there continue to be arrests for offences such as the possession of alcohol and inappropriate dress. In April, rioters attacked a church compound located on disputed land in Khartoum and set it on fire, allegedly following incitement from a local imam. These actions were officially condemned by the government of Sudan as well as Muslim religious leaders.

Women's rights

Female politicians play a role in public life in Sudan, and women are guaranteed a quarter of the seats in the National Assembly. In practice however, women face considerable discrimination, in particular in family and property matters, and gender-based violence is widespread.

Police have used provisions of the Criminal Code outlawing "indecent and immoral acts" to prohibit women from wearing clothes of which they disapprove. In April and again in June, two women were sentenced to death by stoning because of adultery. Both sentences were overturned on appeal. The women were sentenced under article 146 of Sudan's Criminal Act of 1991, which provides that the penalty for adultery by a married person is execution by stoning, and the penalty for an unmarried person is 100 lashes. UK Government officials raised concerns with the government of Sudan in these cases prior to the convictions being overturned.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is widely practised – it is understood that at least 64% of the female population aged 16–49 have undergone some form of genital mutilation (approximately 12 million women). A new DFID programme to eradicate FGM will begin in 2013.

Reports persist of rape being used as a tactic of warfare in Darfur and other conflict-affected areas.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

Homosexual relations are criminalised in Sudan with such activity liable to be punished through floggings, fines, prison sentences and even the death penalty. In 2012, there were credible reports in the press that some homosexual men were charged with indecent acts and sentenced to prison terms or floggings.

Children's rights

Gaps remain in the implementation of the Child Act (enacted in 2010), which raises the age of criminal responsibility, criminalises child exploitation and abuse and, among other things, prohibits recruitment of children to armed groups. We have received credible reports of the use of child soldiers, particularly by armed militia groups in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile States. A UNICEF mission to South Kordofan in August reported seeing no boys over the age of 12 in areas where IDPs had gathered.

Racism

Sudan's interim national constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, but this provision is not effectively enforced. There is evidence of discrimination according to race or ethnicity in many areas of society in Sudan, including employment and education. There were also credible reports in 2012 that detainees from certain ethnic groups faced worse treatment when compared to other ethnic groups, particularly Arab tribes.

Syria

Since the beginning of protests against President Assad's rule across Syria in March 2011, the situation has dramatically worsened. Throughout 2012, the regime continued to use violence against the Syrian people and widespread clashes between opposition fighters and the military persisted. More than 100 people on average were dying every day, and recent UN estimates suggest that over 55,000 people were killed in 2012.

The Assad regime is responsible for numerous human rights violations including unlawful killings, arbitrary detention, sexual violence and torture against men, women and children. The international community has called repeatedly upon the regime to put an end to such atrocities. The United Nations International Commission of Inquiry (COI) stated that some anti-government armed groups were also responsible for committing human rights abuses, though these were not on the same scale as those committed by the regime.

In 2012, the UK sought to reduce the level of human rights violations and abuses and ensure accountability for the perpetrators. The UK has been at the forefront of the work of the UN Human Rights Council and has co-sponsored a number of Human Rights Council resolutions on Syria, including the resolution on 1 June which condemned the al-Houleh massacre of 25–26 May.

The UK supported the Arab-led UN General Assembly 3rd Committee resolution on Syria in November, which condemned the regime and its Shabbiha militias' widespread and systematic human rights violations. The resolution also condemned abuses carried out by some anti-government armed groups.

The UK has worked with the EU to impose sanctions targeting Syrian regime figures responsible for human rights violations. We raised long-standing concerns over human rights with the Syrian government during 2012. Direct communication with the Syrian government became more limited in the course of the year, with the closure of the British Embassy in Damascus in March and the subsequent departure of Syrian diplomats from the Syrian embassy in London in August.

On 20 November, the UK recognised the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people and urged them to commit to the principles set out in relevant human rights conventions and applicable international humanitarian law, including the protection of all religious communities and safe access for humanitarian agencies.

The UK's goal in Syria through 2012 has been for President Assad to step aside to allow for a transition to a more stable, democratic and law-abiding Syria. The intransigence of the Syrian regime and the persistent divisions in the UN Security Council made this difficult to achieve in 2012.

In 2013, the UK Government will increase its efforts to achieve an end to the violence in Syria and make way for a political transition. It is vital that those who committed human rights violations and abuses before and during the conflict are held accountable in law,

though it is for Syrians to determine the precise form of transitional justice in accordance with international standards.

Elections

The UK has urged the Syrian government to introduce genuine reforms and meet the Syrian people's legitimate demands for a peaceful transition to a democratic system. The Syrian government claimed in 2012 to have introduced genuine reform and held a referendum on a new constitution on 26 February. Syrian opposition figures and independent observers criticised the proposed reforms as a charade. Similarly, the parliamentary elections in May were widely considered to be flawed and were boycotted by the opposition.

UN and Arab League Joint Special Envoy, Kofi Annan, drew up the Geneva Communiqué in June in consultation with an action group, including the Permanent Members of the Security Council, leading members of the Arab League and the EU. It renewed the commitment to the six-point plan that Mr Annan had established in February to set out guidelines for a Syrian-led political transition. The UK worked closely with the US and France to encourage the UN Security Council to give its firm backing to Mr Annan's proposal for transition, but these efforts were vetoed by Russia and China. The Syrian regime has shown no willingness to implement the Geneva communiqué.

Freedom of expression and assembly

The Syrian constitution guarantees citizens' rights to freedom of expression and assembly. However, restrictions have increased sharply during the uprising, and throughout 2012 peaceful anti-government protests were dispersed using military force. Online monitoring and censorship of the Internet remained commonplace in 2012.

Syrian state media is tightly controlled and follows the regime narrative, calling the opposition the "terrorist" threat. Opposition activists set up their own channels and used social media sites to counter the regime. Media has increasingly been used for conflict propaganda. Syrian and foreign journalists and their offices were targeted by regime and anti-government armed groups alike. The Committee to Protect Journalists lists 28 journalists killed in Syria in 2012, including most prominently Marie Colvin and Remi Ochlik, who were killed while reporting inside Syria in February.

The UK has supported efforts through the EU, UN and Arab League to bring about an end to the violence against those demonstrating peacefully. We have trained Syrian journalists to improve their ability to report on events in Syria and form a mentored network of capable journalists for the future.

Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders have limited space to operate in Syria. They face a high risk of arbitrary arrest or detention and Syria has no independent human rights monitoring body. In August, a report by the COI expressed concern that Syria's military and security forces had committed crimes against humanity, including killings, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, unlawful imprisonment, and forms of severe deprivation of liberty.

In April, President Assad lifted the state of emergency, which had been in place in Syria since 1963. However, a decree was agreed allowing for detention without trial for up to two months. As violent clashes intensified throughout 2012, arbitrary detention became commonplace.

Despite the Syrian government not providing official statistics on the number of detainees and detention centres located in Syria, independent groups estimate that there could be over 35,000 political prisoners in detention. Most arrests and detentions, including of women and children, are carried out at random. The government's hostile attitude to civil society means that international and diplomatic contact can place human rights defenders at increased risk. On 10 August, the UK announced the provision of an extra £5 million in non-lethal support to the opposition, including training Syrian activists outside the country in order to equip them with the skills and capacity to monitor and document human rights violations more effectively.

Access to justice and the rule of law

Syrian citizens have always been denied proper access to justice. Even prior to the uprisings in March 2011, the judiciary was corrupt, inefficient and lacking independence. Most judges are members of, or affiliated to, the ruling Baath Party, and legislation grants the security forces immunity from prosecution. Although the judicial system has continued to handle civil and criminal cases throughout 2012, to varying degrees of credibility, many Syrians have been detained without trial or are subject to arbitrary judicial processes including in military courts. In July, the Syrian government established new "terrorism courts" that we anticipate are likely to fall far short of international standards.

Media reporting suggests that local councils in areas outside Syrian government control began in 2012 to establish local, improvised justice mechanisms. The UK encouraged these efforts to meet international standards. The UK also sent an expert Human Rights Monitoring Mission to the countries neighbouring Syria in February, to gather evidence that could support a future process of accountability. The mission put together a package to improve the quality of information and evidence gathered by Syrian human rights activists.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called repeatedly for the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court during 2012. The Foreign Secretary has strongly supported initiatives aimed at bringing the situation in Syria to the attention of the International Criminal Court. As Syria is not a State Party to the Rome Statute, this will require a UN Security Council resolution.

The UK welcomed the COI call for human rights violations and abuses to be thoroughly investigated and for evidence to be systematically collected in order to facilitate the process of holding accountable perpetrators from all sides. In September, the COI submitted their second confidential list of individuals and units believed to be responsible for human rights violations and abuses to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Death penalty

The Syrian authorities rarely disclose information about executions. It is unclear how many people were executed in 2012. The UK has urged Syria to impose a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

Extrajudicial killings are a serious issue in Syria. Since the uprisings began, there have been increased reports of people in detention being executed arbitrarily or tortured to death.

Torture

Syria became a State Party to the UN Convention against Torture in 2004 but has failed to implement the convention in practice.

Between 15 February and 20 July, the UN COI interviewed over 81 people about allegations of torture, most of which happened under interrogation by the government's Shabbiha militia. Due to lack of access to detention centres, the COI has not been able to interview detainees directly.

Previous detainees, including women and children of all ages, speak of beatings across the head and body with sharp and blunt instruments. The COI has also documented reports of electric shocks and cigarette burns to the body, sexual violence and deprivation of food, water and sleep. Amnesty International has observed that the rising incidence of torture was reflected by an upsurge in deaths in detention, with at least 200 people, including children, reported to have died in custody in 2012. The limited evidence available indicated torture or other ill-treatment as the likely cause of death. No perpetrators were brought to justice. There have also been reports of armed opposition groups committing abuses such as kidnapping, torture and killing of civilians.

The UK takes a strong stand against torture and has repeatedly raised concerns about reports of torture in Syria in the UN Human Rights Council and other human rights forums.

Conflict and protection of civilians

The Syrian government's response to the protests has had a profound impact on the safety of civilians. The UN estimates that over 60,000 people have died since peaceful protests first began in March 2011. The Syrian regime was responsible for the majority of the violence and destruction in Syria in 2012, though elements of the opposition became increasingly violent.

During 2012, the number of refugees leaving Syria increased, and by the end of the year over 500,000 refugees had sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Across Syria some four million people, including two million internally displaced persons, required humanitarian assistance at the end of the year. DFID supports humanitarian agencies that provide assistance to Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. The UK is playing a leading role in the humanitarian response, providing more than 100,000 people in Syria and across the region with food parcels, blankets and warm clothing. By the end of 2012, the UK had committed a total of £68.5 million to the UN's humanitarian relief effort for Syria.

Freedom of religion or belief

The Syrian constitution safeguards freedom of religion, and this has been generally respected in the past, with religious minority groups enjoying broadly equal legal protection and being able to participate fully in society.

The unrest has had a negative impact on the relationships between Syria's different religious communities. Sectarian tensions increased in 2012 as the Syrian regime blamed fundamentalist Islamist terrorists for the violence and incited fear among minority communities. The regime used armed gangs (Shabbiha) of minority Allawite members to crack down on protesters, most of whom are part of Syria's Sunni majority. This has led to violence and sectarian reprisals between the different communities.

Throughout 2012, the UK encouraged Syrian opposition groups to reach out to all Syrians, including minority communities, and maintain a clear commitment to a peaceful and non-sectarian approach. Since the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces formed in November, it has sought to be fully representative of the Syrian people and committed to respecting ethnic and religious minorities.

Women's rights

Syria is now ranked 132 out of 135 countries in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index 2012. The Syrian constitution in principle grants full equality to women, but gender inequality remains a problem. On 3 January, President Assad amended the Penal Code by decree to increase the minimum penalty for murder and other violent crimes committed against women in the name of family "honour" from two years to between five and seven years. The decree also imposed a penalty of at least two years' imprisonment for rape or other sexual assault; formerly, perpetrators were exempt from prosecution or punishment if they married their victim.

In 2012, despite the difficulty in collecting evidence due to cultural, social and religious beliefs surrounding marriage and sexuality, the UN COI documented that rape and sexual violence were being carried out by the regime's militia.

The fear of rape and other sexual assault has restricted the freedom of movement for many girls and women within Syria. Humanitarian agencies have also raised concerns about sexual exploitation of Syrian refugees and about reports of coerced marriages of female refugees. The UK is supporting humanitarian agencies to provide the necessary support to vulnerable Syrian refugee women.

Minority rights and racism

Syria is a diverse society. Specific demographic data is unreliable, but estimates suggest that Sunni Muslims comprise about 74% of the population, Allawite (a branch of Shia Islam) 11%, Christians 10%, Druze 3%, and other Muslims 2%. Tens of thousands of Syrian ethnic minority Kurds have been stateless since changes to Syria's nationality laws in the 1960s. Human Rights Watch estimates that there are around 300,000 stateless Kurds living in Syria today.

The popular unrest that began in March 2011 has exacerbated latent ethnic and sectarian tensions in Syria. Although fighting continues between those loyal to the regime and those against it, there are some instances where sectarian groups have been singled out and attacked. Such incidents have taken place in mixed communities or where armed groups have attempted to take over areas inhabited by pro-government minorities.

Children's rights

Children have been severely affected by the violence in Syria. The UN COI recorded more than 125 children killed since January, and more than 10 children were killed in a mortar strike on a school in Damascus in November. Children as young as 10 have been held in detention facilities with adults, breaching the Syrian Government's obligations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The UN COI speculated that anti-government armed groups could be using children as messengers and porters. If proven, this would constitute a war crime. Torture of children in detention, including sexual torture of boys in front of adult men, has taken place. The commission documents children suffering post-traumatic mental health problems. The government's refusal to allow children medical treatment, the use of schools as detention facilities and interruption of education has also been reported.

Children's rights organisations have expressed concern about the welfare of Syrian child refugees in neighbouring countries. Children make up around 200,000 of the refugee population.

Foreign Secretary William Hague at the United Nations Security Council meeting on Syria, 31 January 2012

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is a signatory to most international human rights instruments and its national legislation and constitution contain provisions for the protection of those rights. In 2012, we continued to have significant human rights concerns in Turkmenistan. There is a broad gap between the government's rhetoric on democracy and human rights and its practice.

This was underlined when Turkmenistan appeared before the UN Human Rights Committee in March. The HRC noted that, while Turkmenistan had shown willingness to improve its human rights record, there was a broad gap between the country's legislation and its implementation, including in relation to the prohibition of torture, degrading treatment, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. More generally, the media continues to be tightly controlled and Internet access limited. Corruption and lack of transparency are serious problems. Turkmenistan also has yet to make significant progress towards a pluralistic political system. Nevertheless, there were some modest positive developments in certain areas in 2012. These included further, albeit limited, access to a detention facility by an independent international organisation; Turkmenistan hosting a significant international media conference for the first time; the return to the market of an independent mobile phone and Internet operator; the establishment of official human rights resource centres in each of the country's five regions; and the release of a small number individuals whose cases had been raised by the UK and others.

Our objectives for 2012 were to use high-level engagement and other opportunities to encourage progress on human rights. As anticipated in the last report, the Turkmen authorities maintained a policy of committing to reforms but taking only incremental steps in putting those commitments into practice. We were able to work with the Turkmen authorities in some areas such as media reform, the rule of law, and transparency and openness.

In 2013, the UK will continue to use high-level engagement to encourage Turkmenistan to do more to meet its international human rights obligations. We will also work with key international partners – particularly the EU and OSCE – to encourage reform. We will support action to hold the next round of the EU/Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogue as soon as possible. We will also participate fully as Turkmenistan undergoes its next Universal Periodic Review in April/May 2013. Overall, however, we judge that Turkmenistan's concerns about security and stability, allied to an inherently cautious approach to change, mean that the prospects for substantive reform in the short to medium term are limited.

Elections

The main event of the year was the presidential election on 12 February. A pre-election assessment by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) concluded that the electoral process would not meet international standards. It referred in particular to concerns about ongoing restrictions on fundamental freedoms, the limited choice between competing political alternatives, and the need to bring Turkmenistan's legal framework into line with OSCE commitments for democratic elections. In the circumstances, ODIHR did not deploy an observer mission. On the day, President Berdimuhamedov was

re-elected with over 97% of the vote from a reported turnout of over 96%. The EU expressed concern about the conduct of the election.

President Berdimuhamedov signed a new law on political parties in January. This was too late for it to have an impact on the presidential election, but it has potentially opened the door to a different political landscape in Turkmenistan. Parliamentary elections at the end of 2013 will reveal the extent to which these changes represent meaningful reform. We will continue to encourage the Turkmen authorities to move towards a democratic system.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Turkmenistan was ranked 196 out of 197 countries in the latest Freedom of the Press Index published by US-based NGO, Freedom House. It remains impossible to buy international newspapers or any other foreign written media in Turkmenistan. Internet access remains under-developed and strictly controlled. The Turkmen government continues to block social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter. On a more positive note, the independent Russian mobile phone and Internet operator MTS, whose operation in Turkmenistan was suspended in December 2010, returned to the market on 30 August. Satellite dishes capable of receiving Russian, Turkish and other international news and entertainment channels remain readily available.

The BBC World Service Trust/Media Action has been working to build capacity within Turkmenistan to engage with the international media and improve access to information for foreign journalists, including facilitating a successful application by Turkmenistan for membership of the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union. We supported a visit to London in March by a delegation of Turkmen media representatives to meet the BBC, the Press Complaints Commission, Ofcom and the National Union of Journalists. The UK also contributed funds for the 14th Central Asian Media Conference in Ashgabat on 5–6 July, managed by the OSCE. This was the first time that Turkmenistan had agreed to host the event.

Turkmenistan finally adopted a new media law on 22 December. The BBC World Trust and OSCE were among those who provided advice during the drafting stages. At the time of writing, we and other international observers are looking to assess the law and its impact on the media environment in Turkmenistan.

In spite of the existence of relevant legal provisions, the authorities do not allow citizens to exercise the right to assembly.

Human rights defenders

The EU, UN Development Programme and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights have been working to increase understanding in Turkmenistan about international human rights standards and mechanisms. One outcome has been that official Human Rights Resource Centres are now operating in each of Turkmenistan's five regions. These centres represent a modest but important means to raise awareness about human rights in Turkmenistan.

But independent human rights defenders such as the Vienna-based Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights are unable to operate and the registration process for independent NGOs is complex, bureaucratic and effectively subject to arbitrary assessment by the state. The authorities have also sought in the past to prevent Turkmen human rights defenders from attending international human rights and civil society meetings held outside Turkmenistan. Unregistered NGO activity is punishable by fines, short-term detention and confiscation of property. Civil society organisations have little awareness of human rights work or ability to reach a wider audience. The UK was pleased therefore to work jointly with the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat on a seminar in March to enhance participants' skills and knowledge about project preparation and management.

Access to justice and the rule of law

Corruption and general lack of transparency remains a significant problem in Turkmenistan. Transparency International ranked Turkmenistan 170 out of 176 states surveyed in its Corruption Perceptions Index published on 5 December.

It remains difficult for individuals to challenge court decisions. We have yet to see evidence of an improvement in sentencing and prison conditions.

There have been some positive developments on individual cases of concern. Ilmurad Nurliev, a Pentecostal pastor who was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in October 2010, ostensibly for fraud, but whose conviction a number of NGOs believe was connected to his involvement in an unregistered religious organisation, received a presidential pardon on 16 February. Bisengul Begdesenov also received presidential pardon on 16 February. Mr Begdesenov had been given a suspended sentence of nine years in May 2011 for fraudulent activities but, again, reliable NGO reporting suggests the real reason may have been official concern about his (unsuccessful) attempt to register an ethnic Kazakh cultural centre in Ashgabat. In a separate development, Owezgeldi Atayew and his wife, who were accused of engineering a suicide attempt by their daughter-in-law and were sentenced in February 2007 to five years in prison, have been released. Under the constitution of Turkmenistan, Mr Atayew was set to become the country's interim leader in 2006 following the death of President Niyazov and pending the selection of a new President. Their release was confirmed by the Turkmen delegation during the UN Human Rights Committee meeting in New York in March.

Our Embassy in Ashgabat arranged a visit to Turkmenistan in March by experts on the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). The purpose of the visit was to build on the first ever seminar on EITI in Turkmenistan in September 2011 by deepening understanding in the Turkmen government about the initiative, which provides a global standard for the transparent management of revenues from natural resources, its principles and its benefits. We will look for further opportunities in 2013 to encourage and develop cooperation in this area. We will also continue to raise with the Turkmen authorities the importance of the rule of law, including lobbying on individual cases where appropriate.

Death penalty

Turkmenistan co-sponsored the draft resolution on a "Moratorium on the use of the Death Penalty" during the 67th session of the UN General Assembly in New York. The UK

welcomes this, as their co-sponsorship helps to ensure wide cross-regional support for the resolution. Turkmenistan abolished the death penalty in 1999.

Torture

Turkmenistan's parliament passed a number of legislative changes on 4 August, including an amendment to the Criminal Code that brings the definition of torture in Turkmen law into line with Article 1 of the UN Convention against Torture. But it will remain difficult to make a fully accurate assessment of the treatment of prisoners and other detainees until international bodies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are allowed full and unfettered access to detention facilities in Turkmenistan. A UN report in June 2011 raised concerns about reports of widespread torture in places of detention and stressed the need for substantive progress in Turkmenistan's prison system. Security officials are believed to use excessive force, including beating, when intent on extracting confessions from detainees. We are encouraged, however, by the fact that Turkmenistan granted access by an ICRC delegation to a juvenile correctional facility in Mary in April, building on a similar visit to the medical unit of another detention facility in 2011.

Prison conditions are unsanitary, overcrowded and unsafe. Some facilities are located in areas of extremely harsh climate conditions, with excessive heat in the summers and freezing temperatures in the winter. The nutritional value of prison food is poor. The Turkmen government has, however, declared its intention to modernise existing penitentiary facilities and build new ones according to international standards. In June, it adopted a juvenile justice programme for children under 18, developed in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF, which seeks to align Turkmenistan's legislation, policies and practice with international norms on juvenile justice, rights and freedoms. Overall, however, much more progress needs to be made on all of these issues. The UK will continue to encourage the Turkmen authorities to allow full and independent access to detention facilities and individual prisoners, including by UN Special Rapporteurs.

Freedom of religion or belief

We remain concerned about religious freedom in Turkmenistan. Religion is largely government-controlled and any religious organisation wishing to operate in the country is required to register with the authorities. Obtaining registration is not easy because of bureaucratic and other hurdles, and those organisations that have registered can find it difficult to operate due to government constraints on opening new premises and size of services. The law prohibits proselytising. It also prohibits the publication of religious literature. The importation of any religious publication has to be approved by the Council of Religious Affairs and it remains hard to obtain permission. Individuals and religious communities still experience administrative restrictions or various other forms of harassment.

A Turkmen citizen, Vladimir Nuryllaev, was convicted on 18 January to four years' imprisonment, ostensibly for distributing pornographic material but international human rights NGOs asserted that his conviction flowed directly from his status as a Jehovah's Witness. EU Heads of Mission raised their concern about this case in February. Vladimir Nuryllaev was released as part of a broader presidential amnesty on 17 May.

We have been concerned about further reports during the year of harassment and some cases of detention affecting certain other religious communities such as Protestants in Turkmenistan's Lebap region. As a result, the British Embassy (as local EU Presidency) and EU partners in Ashgabat raised the issue with the Turkmen authorities, underlining the need to respect fundamental and universal values of freedom of thought, conscience and belief, and the importance of Turkmenistan abiding by its international commitments and obligations.

Minority rights

Although Turkmenistan's legal framework provides for equal rights and freedoms for all citizens, national minority groups within the country (particularly ethnic Uzbeks and Russians) find it difficult to preserve their national and linguistic identity and exercise freedom of travel as a result of legal and other pressures designed to reinforce Turkmenistan's national identity (for example legislation that obliges dual nationals to choose either Turkmen or Russian citizenship). Citizens belonging to ethnic minorities are mostly excluded from government jobs even if they speak Turkmen. A presidential decree requires that at least 70% of the personnel employed by an organisation have to be Turkmen. The state is by far the major employer in Turkmenistan.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

Male homosexuality is punishable by imprisonment (from 2 to 20 years). Female homosexuality is not mentioned in the Criminal Code. Although provisions concerning homosexuality are rarely applied, homophobia is widespread and homosexuals hide their sexual orientation to avoid discrimination.

Uzbekistan

While there were some positive developments during 2012, we continued to have significant human rights concerns in Uzbekistan, in particular about the lack of freedom of expression, severe restrictions on political activity and on religious activity outside a state-approved framework, and the alleged use of torture by law enforcement officials. There remained a significant gap between government rhetoric and legislation, and the protection of human rights.

November 2010's "Concept for the Further Deepening of Democratic Reforms and Establishment of Civil Society" continued to set the framework for the development of the Uzbek government's declared human rights policy. President Karimov cited the "Concept" in a December speech as a long-term national strategy. In Uzbekistan, 2012 was the "Year of the Family" and saw legislation and a number of large funding projects to improve family well-being and opportunities for women, including in business. The government put forward a number of new pieces of human rights-related legislation during the year, emanating from the "Concept", including a law on criminal investigations, which set out the rights of citizens in investigations and stipulated that no one should be subjected to torture. Another apparently positive step was the creation of a working group under the Minister of Justice to study the observance of human rights by law enforcement and other state agencies. However, a significant gap remained between government rhetoric, legislation and the protections in Uzbekistan's constitution, and the actions of the authorities in practice.

In 2012, we sought to expand our cooperation with the Uzbek authorities on human rights issues. We have made some progress on joint project work. In addition to criminal justice reform issues, the UK focused on further enhancing parliamentary links. Visits by UK ministers and parliamentarians including Baroness Warsi, now FCO Senior Minister of State, Baroness Stern and Lord Waverley further enhanced parliamentary ties and led to the establishment of an exchange project for parliamentary clerks.

The UK continued to raise its concerns with the Uzbek government during 2012 about the use of forced labour, including forced child labour, in the cotton harvest. Like many in the international community, we welcomed the fact that in 2012 there was no mass mobilisation of children under the age of 15 for the cotton harvest.

Additionally, the UK concentrated on freedom of expression issues, and engagement with the human rights defender community in Uzbekistan. The overall climate for freedom of expression and assembly worsened during 2012. It remained challenging to work with and support the efforts of human rights defenders in a deteriorating operating environment. There were some high-profile releases of activists in detention, but others were harassed, arbitrarily detained or forced to leave the country.

The government plans to pass new laws during 2013 on public transparency, social partnership and legal precedence with the stated aim of strengthening civil society's role in protecting constitutional rights. Other legislation coming into force will include amendments to the electoral code in advance of parliamentary and presidential elections in 2014 and 2015 respectively. Uzbekistan has its second Universal Periodic Review in May 2013 and

will also be required to submit a report on its obligations under the Convention against Torture. In 2013, the UK will continue to work towards close cooperation with government agencies to improve human rights protection in the country, taking forward projects in criminal justice reform and parliamentary engagement, including a project linking parliamentarians to their constituents. Despite the difficult environment, we will continue in meetings, outreach and advocacy, to support the rights of human rights defenders and independent journalists to do their work free of harassment or risk of arbitrary detention.

Freedom of expression and assembly

In late 2012, the Uzbek parliament passed new legislation on freedom of speech on the Internet and on television, as part of a package of laws emanating from the "Concept for the Further Deepening of Democratic Reforms and Establishment of Civil Society". Despite these legislative improvements, the year saw further deterioration of freedom of expression and assembly. There were several reports of arrests of those who chose to speak out against areas of concern (for example on the use of forced labour in the cotton harvest) or advocate citizens' rights (for example membership of independent trade unions).

Uzbekistan's print media is dominated by state-controlled publishers, and the state also largely controls the printing and distribution infrastructure. Self-censorship remained widespread in 2012. Online content expressing opposition views was blocked inside Uzbekistan, as were several international news outlets' websites, including Deutsche Welle, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe's Uzbek Service. The government continued its tight control on access to Uzbekistan by foreign journalists. BBC journalist Natalia Antelava was detained in Uzbekistan's airport in March and subsequently put on a plane to Almaty, Kazakhstan without being allowed to enter Uzbekistan. Independent journalists operating abroad reported so-called "denial of service" attacks on their opposition news services. The number of independent Uzbek journalists attempting to continue their work inside Uzbekistan further diminished in 2012, following a concerted campaign against Elena Bondar, who eventually left the country during the summer of 2012. Viktor Krymzalov, Pavel Kravets and Said Abdurakhimov also experienced pressure in the form of harassment.

The UK sponsored a project focusing on the link between the development of civil society and freedom of the media. The project also looked at how the legislature is scrutinised and held accountable by parliament and the media. In an overall tightening environment for freedom of expression, and renewed pressure on independent voices (for example the actions of the authorities against independent journalists, listed above), the impact of such project work was limited, but it is a platform on which to try to build in partnership with other organisations during 2013.

There was little or no opportunity for Uzbeks to exercise their right to peaceful assembly during 2012, due to pressure on citizens not to gather. We know of five attempts to bring together groups of citizens to protest about specific issues including gas shortages and the detainment of individuals on religious extremism charges. In each case they were broken up by the law enforcement agencies, and in several cases the individuals concerned were warned or detained. Human rights defenders Adelaida Kim and Elena Urlaeva of the unregistered Human Rights Alliance were among those arrested during 2012 for attempting

to protest. Opposition party Birdamlik reported pressure on members attempting to join peaceful protests.

Uzbekistan's constitution allows for independent political parties. In practice however, there was no genuine opposition to the government in 2012. There are severe restrictions on the registration of new parties and the nomination of candidates. New legislation brought in at the end of the year, and expected to come into force in 2013, may simplify some procedures.

Human rights defenders

During 2012, 45,383 Uzbek and foreign nationals were reportedly released or had the charges against them dropped in the 2011–12 amnesty of prisoners. Strict rules on the terms under which serving prisoners could be released meant that no imprisoned human rights defenders, political prisoners or journalists fell under the amnesty. Separately, during 2012, Alisher Karamatov and Habibula Okpulatov of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan were released, having served nearly six years and just over seven years respectively. We welcomed these releases, while continuing to call for the release of all imprisoned human rights defenders, political prisoners and independent journalists.

Human rights defenders reported difficult detention conditions, including in the Jaslyk Special Regime Colony, where Azamjon Formonov, Chairman of a local branch of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, has been imprisoned since 2006. Acute humanitarian concerns were also reported at other facilities in the cases of Akzam Turgunov and Dilmurod Saidov. Two leading members of opposition Erk party saw their prison terms extended during 2012. Murad Juraev, former member of the Supreme Council of Uzbekistan, was jailed for eight years in 1994. He has now served 18 years and in December saw his prison term extended for the fifth time, for a further three years. Mohammad Bekjanov, former editor of Erk newspaper, member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, and brother of Mohammad Salikh (head of the opposition umbrella group, People's Movement of Uzbekistan), saw his term extended for a further five years, just a few days before his expected release in January. In both cases the Erk members were charged with infringement of prison rules.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has an agreement with the Uzbek government which grants it access to Uzbek prisons. The ICRC does not share its findings with those outside the Uzbek government. However, several cases were reported in opposition news websites during the year of political prisoners and human rights defenders being moved or concealed during ICRC visits. A human rights defender in prison reported bad treatment from prison officials following his meeting with ICRC representatives.

Those human rights defenders at liberty continued to report harassment and pressure throughout 2012. A pattern emerged whereby a case against a person would be opened following low-level harassment such as verbal threats including against family members, surveillance, detention in psychiatric hospital and, in one case, beatings on the street. In each instance observed by the British Embassy, evidence was weak and authorities appeared to attempt to prevent access by independent observers to the trial. Several individuals who experienced such treatment and were informed by law enforcement agencies that the result of the trial was preordained, left Uzbekistan during 2012 to seek

asylum overseas. The whereabouts of Jamshed Karimov, an independent journalist and activist, and nephew of the Uzbek President, remained unknown during 2012 after his reported disappearance following his release from a psychiatric hospital in late 2011.

Access to justice and the rule of law

The past year saw several positive developments in Uzbekistan's reform efforts in rule of law and access to justice, including ongoing training and cooperation with the OSCE to enhance the professional skills of judges, lawyers and officials; and several new laws and amendments to legislation, expanding *habeas corpus* and setting out the rights of citizens in criminal investigations by law enforcement agencies. The UK is one of three European partners helping to deliver a €10 million EU criminal justice reform project, launched in February. The UK's involvement was primarily focused on police and prison reform, and included the secondment of a long-term expert from the National Police Improvement Agency.

Despite these positive developments, the pace of reform remained very slow. The experience of Gulnoza Yuldasheva, who appealed to local authorities for support in investigating a human-trafficking ring and was subsequently herself targeted and eventually sentenced to prison, highlighted serious issues with access to justice for Uzbek citizens. There were cases throughout the year to which all access by observers was refused, including in the trials of around 35 people in September on charges including the "illegal establishment of religious organisations". Human rights groups expressed concern that these trials were based on fabricated charges, and that subsequent appeals appeared to have pre-determined outcomes.

A Tajik citizen, Said Ashurov, former chief metallurgist at Amantaytau Goldfields, remained in prison for espionage; the credibility of the case against Mr Ashurov remained in doubt. The British Government continued to urge the Uzbek authorities to consider Mr Ashurov's release at the earliest opportunity.

Uzbekistan was ranked 170 out of 174 countries in Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index. Uzbekistan's 2008 national anti-corruption programme was not fully implemented. Nevertheless, fighting corruption remained high on the government's stated list of priorities and several measures were taken, including amending the rules governing the activities of traffic police, and the arrest of several individuals in high-ranking positions on charges of corruption.

Torture

Given ongoing restrictions on the access of international organisations to prisons and detention centres, and tight controls on the flow of information, it remained difficult to substantiate allegations of torture and of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Serious allegations emerged during the year, including the death of an inmate as a result of injuries inflicted by torture, lengthy periods of isolation for political prisoners and human rights defenders, and regular beatings.

We welcomed positive legislative developments, including the expansion of *habeas corpus* legislation. UK project work in this area was linked to helping to bridge the gap between

existing and new legislation, and its implementation. In high-level encounters with the Uzbek authorities, the British Embassy continued to urge the return of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture – who has not visited Uzbekistan since 2002 – and for Uzbekistan to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. The UK invited leading penal reform expert Baroness Vivien Stern CBE to Uzbekistan in March to launch a new phase of UK–Uzbekistan cooperation on prison reform issues. Baroness Stern's visit led to the launch of a project with the National Human Rights Centre, sharing experience of the UK system of independent monitoring of prisons by citizens. Access to prisons by foreign organisations is severely limited but in late 2012, the British Embassy was for the first time granted permission to visit an "open" prison.

Freedom of religion or belief

Uzbekistan's constitution protects freedom of religion or belief. However, many laws were used by the government to restrict this freedom, including tight control of registration of religious organisations. Reports of harassment of individuals practising their faith outside state controls included raids on Baptist churches and fines on individuals, the arrest and imprisonment of several Jehovah's Witnesses, and the imprisonment and lengthy sentences of up to 80 Muslims charged with terrorism and religious extremism offences.

Children's rights

UK work in support of efforts to abolish the use of forced child labour in the cotton harvest, through greater diversification of agricultural produce, included the funding of a bio-laboratory in Andijan Agricultural University.

International Labour Organization monitors did not monitor the cotton harvest in 2012. Monitoring by embassies, UNICEF and other international organisations cannot replace full, independent and substantive monitoring by the International Labour Organization. However, in 2012, these organisations were given unfettered access by the Uzbek authorities to the cotton harvest, and attempted to observe as widely as possible. No forced mass mobilisation of children aged under 15 was observed. We welcome this progress and encourage further efforts towards full implementation of Uzbekistan's obligations under International Labour Organization conventions.

Vietnam

The lack of legal and political accountability in one-party state Vietnam remains a serious obstacle to progress on human rights. The main areas of concern relate to civil and political rights, in particular freedom of expression. In 2012, there has been little or no sign of improvement in these areas.

Although Vietnam is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and some specific rights, such as the right to freedom of expression, are enshrined in the Vietnamese constitution and domestic law, the authorities fail to live up to many of their domestic and international human rights obligations.

Nevertheless, rapidly increasing Internet penetration has enabled a steady rise in politically motivated or independent criticism of the government and its policies through blogs and other social media. The Communist Party has taken action throughout 2012 to try to smother any criticism which it views as a threat to Vietnam's stability or to its own control. Lack of an independent and transparent judicial system enables the government to meet any perceived challenge to the status quo with arrest under Article 88 of the Penal Code – "conducting anti-state propaganda". The authorities continue to control traditional media and use national security laws and administrative sanctions to further the party's agenda. While the government tried to restrict the space in which the media operated, the other body with responsibility for oversight of the government, the National Assembly, gained credibility as a forum for debate, despite systemic constraints such as the large majority of its representatives being members of, and vetted by, the party.

In 2012, the UK's human rights activity focused on three areas: political engagement; promoting freedom of expression (including free speech, freedom of the media and the Internet and access to information); and working to promote openness and transparency, including in the fight against corruption. We continued to raise human rights concerns at the highest levels, including by the Foreign Secretary during his visit in April, by former Foreign Office Minister Jeremy Browne during his visit in July, and more frequently by our Ambassador in Hanoi. We also work with the EU to promote human rights, more recently at the EU–Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue on in October. There is modest progress in our work with the media, government and civil society to support the development of an open and professional media sector in Vietnam. For example, the FCO funded a project which piloted a model to protect journalists from attacks and safeguard their rights. However, there are no clear signs that the Vietnamese authorities will adopt a more tolerant approach towards freedom of expression or other civil and political rights. We also expect land rights to be an issue in 2013.

In 2013, we will continue to engage politically on human rights with the Vietnamese, at ministerial and senior official levels, through the Vietnam–UK Strategic Partnership, which provides a comprehensive framework to develop the bilateral relationship. The UK and Vietnam will discuss possible UK help with technical assistance and practical support to prepare and follow up Vietnam's Universal Periodic Review. These are good opportunities for UK–Vietnam engagement on human rights and for Vietnam to take the first steps in the international arena embracing human rights.

In 2013, the UK will look to input comments into the United Nations Development Programme on the draft land rights law. We will use our lead role on anti-corruption to challenge the government and highlight the importance of this issue. The UK Chair, the government of Vietnam and the Communist Party will develop outcomes for the 12th Anti-Corruption Dialogue that supports increased private sector engagement in the anti-corruption agenda, including through a business forum, and grassroots action to tackle corruption.

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression remains a problem as the Vietnamese authorities continue to use tough national security laws to punish critics of the regime.

A case which hit the headlines in foreign media and on the blogs but was unreported in the state-censored media is that of student Nguyen Phuong Uyen who, on 19 October, disappeared after being taken to a police station for questioning. Two weeks later she was officially arrested and charged for distributing anti-state leaflets and "security matters". As of February 2013, she remains in pre-trial detention.

The official media remained tightly controlled by government censorship and obstruction; an FCO-funded survey showed that nearly 88% of journalists in one province had experienced obstruction of some sort in their work. At the same time, the level of online criticism of the state by unofficial bloggers increased. The government's response also intensified with a crackdown on critical blogs and longer prison sentences for bloggers. In September, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung ordered the police to take action against three popular bloggers: Dan Lam Bao, Quan Lam Bao and Bien Dong, who were critical of the government. Later that month, three high-profile bloggers, Nguyen Van Hai, Ta Phong Tan and Phan Thanh Hai, were sentenced to up to 12 years in prison for disseminating anti-state propaganda. The UK and others raised their collective concerns via a démarche about the imprisonment of these five individuals. The UK also supported the EU **High Representative's statement**, which highlighted serious concern over the convictions.

At the same time, the UK continued to work with the media sector to enhance journalists' professional reporting skills through workshops with the BBC and ethical performance through development of a broadcasting code of practice. The NGO RED Communication (Centre for Research on Development Communication) in collaboration with Dak Lak provincial authorities set up a model to raise journalists' awareness of their rights and responsibilities under Vietnamese law. This was a success and created a safer working environment for journalists through better engagement and understanding between the media and government authorities, including the police.

The UK frequently highlights our concerns about government-imposed media restrictions – for example Decision 20/2011, which required all foreign language content to be edited and translated, including live news channels. The UK with other EU member states lobbied the Vietnamese to withdraw this legislation because of our concerns about the effect this would have on the ability of news corporations such as the BBC to operate in Vietnam. As a result, implementation of the decree was postponed, for the second time, for six months.

Freedom of assembly

Restrictions on the freedom to assemble remain a problem in Vietnam. In April, police and security forces forcibly removed protesters from a site in Hung Yen province that had been authorised for commercial development. There were credible reports of some protesters being beaten, and the state-run media reported that there were more than 20 arrests and that two journalists were also attacked by police during the incident. In December, hundreds of people joined anti-China protests in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Initially, these demonstrations were tolerated but they were later stopped by the authorities. According to media reports and blogs, at least 20 people were detained in Hanoi after they refused to obey police instructions to disperse. They were all released later that day.

In 2011, the Vietnamese Prime Minister requested the National Assembly to issue a Law on Demonstration. Concerns remain that this law will suppress legitimate demonstrations rather than enable them.

Access to justice and the rule of law

Concerns remain over the lack of independence and transparency in the legal and judicial systems. There is poor coordination between the key agencies mandated with investigating, prosecuting and sentencing in criminal cases. Through the British Council's management of the Justice Partnership Programme (JPP) project, the UK is supporting judicial reform of the three main justice sector agencies: the Ministry of Justice, Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuracy. Progress, however, remains very slow and a number of cases in 2012 offer little evidence of the defendants being given a fair trial.

In late February, representatives from the Vietnamese National Assembly visited the UK to learn about the UK's experience of promoting accountability and transparency in law-making. During their visit, they held talks with UK parliamentarians seeing at first hand the workings of Parliament. The delegation also visited the Supreme Court and Transparency International. The findings of the visit have been reflected in the revision of the Law on Anti-Corruption led by the Committee on Justice and in a proposal on how to improve Deputies' meetings with voters.

Land-use rights in Vietnam, long a contentious issue domestically, came to international prominence following a land dispute in the Tien Lang District. Fish-farmer Doan Van Vuon and family members used shotguns and explosives to prevent the police from confiscating his smallholding. There was widespread public sympathy for the plight of Mr Vuon. On 10 February, the Vietnamese Prime Minister criticised the local authorities and praised the media for their coverage, ordering all provinces to review their land management practices. Land-use rights are an increasing source of tension amongst farming communities, who still form the majority of the population, and other groups that live close to major population centres. In particular, the issue of compensation for reclaimed land continues to dominate public discourse as the country becomes more urbanised, and more land is reclaimed by the government for industrial use. The government has recognised how sensitive this issue is and has opened public consultation on a draft of the new land law. The UK has provided direct funding for public consultations across society to ensure that the consultation represents the broadest possible base of interests.

The Vietnamese government has acknowledged publicly that corruption is damaging the party and presents a major obstacle to economic growth. The National Assembly passed a revised law on anti-corruption, and the UK chairs the government's formal Anti-Corruption Dialogue on behalf of international donors. The focus of the 2012 high-level dialogue meeting in December was corruption at local and provincial level.

Death penalty

Figures on the death penalty officially remain a state secret, but figures from the Ministry of Public Services show an increase from 80 to 100 in the last year of the number of people sentenced to the death penalty. Since November 2011, policy has been to carry out the death penalty only by the administration of lethal drugs. Due to the limited supply of these drugs, there has been a *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty. This has led to a high number of prisoners on death row awaiting execution in poor conditions.

In November, the Vietnamese government abstained in a UN vote in the United Nations General Assembly's Third Committee on the resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on the death penalty. Working with EU partners, we continued to urge the Vietnamese to introduce a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, and in the meantime to adopt a more transparent approach to its application.

Freedom of religion or belief

Religious freedom is allowed in Vietnam although in practice, the government restricts some religious worship on the grounds of interests of national security. Through the EU–Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue, the EU highlighted concerns about the reported harassment of religious groups, the delays in registering churches and the refusal of the authorities to allow churches to train pastors. Progress is being made, however, with the building of new places of worship, recognition of new religious groups and registering new congregations.

Women's rights

Human trafficking, particularly of young women from Vietnam to elsewhere in the region, remains a serious concern. Vietnam's anti-trafficking legislation, introduced in 2011, had led to a significant number of successful prosecutions of traffickers. Vietnam ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and acceded to the Palermo Protocol on Human Trafficking in June 2012.

The UK was part of a group of donors that carried out the Country Gender Assessment for Vietnam with the government. This showed a number of problems, including the need for better employment opportunities; improved political participation; reduction in domestic violence; and more effective implementation of the gender equality law and the domestic violence law. These were included in the government-approved National Strategy, and National Programme, for Gender Equality. Through FCO funding, the NGO Pacific Links Foundation has built a rehabilitation centre in Lao Cai for Vietnamese girls who are victims of human trafficking into China.

Children's rights

Vietnamese children are the most reported nationality of children trafficked to the UK, mainly for criminal and labour exploitation Vietnam's anti-trafficking legislation, introduced in 2011,

recognised the trafficking of children as well as of adults. UNICEF and Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), released a hard-hitting report on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) in Vietnam in November.

In February, Vietnam became a State Party to the Hague Convention on Adoption. Vietnam has introduced a number of measures focusing on protecting children, including UNICEF's work with Vietnam to achieve a better social welfare structure. Close cooperation between the Vietnamese and UK authorities led to the removal from Vietnam of a number of UK-registered child sex offenders.

Yemen

Throughout 2012, Yemen failed to meet its international human rights commitments in most areas, notably on juvenile execution and detention of political prisoners. The National Unity Government (NUG) has repeatedly stated its intention to uphold basic rights, tackle impunity and investigate allegations of human rights violations and abuses, but implementation has been slow. Calls by the international community for transparent investigations into the violence and deaths of over 200 civilian protesters in 2011, the wholesale release of political prisoners, the passing of a law on transitional justice, improving basic services to ordinary Yemenis and protecting civilians from armed conflict have not yet been addressed. Some, but not all, activists detained during Yemen's Arab Spring have been released. Promises were made to conduct investigations according to international standards, and a decree issued in September to set up a panel, but there is no evidence of further action. The humanitarian situation remains critical and there are over half a million internally displaced persons, many of whom fear returning to their homes because of the threat of armed conflict, instability and the lack of state control. We welcome the signing of the agreement by the Yemen authorities and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in September to formalise the opening of an OHCHR office in Yemen. The human rights ministry has proactively raised the profile of human rights, making preparations for the creation of an independent national human rights institution and also, on 9–10 December, organising Yemen's first national human rights conference.

The security, economic and humanitarian situations in Yemen remain fragile. A political transition, unique in the region, is edging forward but remains delicate and complex. The UK took a leading role in restarting and reinvigorating the Friends of Yemen process, which the Foreign Secretary co-chairs with his Saudi and Yemeni counterparts. The Friends of Yemen provides international support for Yemen's political transition whilst holding the Yemeni government accountable for progress, including on implementing a transitional justice law. At two meetings of the Friends, and together with a conference of donors, nearly $8 billion was raised for development projects, including £196 million from the UK. The UK also supported UN Security Council Resolution 2051, which includes the principle of an end to impunity and importance of accountability. The UK sponsored resolutions at the March and September sessions of the Human Rights Council encouraging the NUG to implement OHCHR recommendations, in particular on detentions, to end the recruitment of child soldiers and encourage the participation of women in public and private spheres. We urged the NUG to ratify a law on transitional justice and worked through the EU to lobby the NUG to end the practice of juvenile capital punishment.

In 2013, we expect the Yemeni government formally to adopt the transitional justice law, but as this is likely to be a non-judicial process, we expect it will not address all the concerns of those affected by violence up to and including in 2011. President Hadi is expected to announce the start of the National Dialogue Conference. This is a key milestone of transition designed to bring together all parts of Yemeni society, including southerners, women and youth groups, to build consensus on the future of Yemen. In December, Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt visited Yemen and travelled to Aden to encourage the participation of southern Yemeni factions in the National Dialogue. The conference will provide a platform for the expression of long-standing grievances and will conclude with

recommendations on constitutional and electoral reform. In parallel, we expect the Yemeni electoral commission to conclude updating the electoral register to enable millions of entitled voters to participate. A referendum on a new constitution will follow.

The UK will continue to support the Yemeni government's efforts to improve its human rights record, including through additional support at the fifth meeting of the Friends of Yemen due to be hosted by the UK on 7 March 2013. The importance of transitional justice and reconciliation, and independent investigations into allegations of human rights abuses and violations, was underlined at the last meeting in New York. We will participate in reviewing progress by the NUG at the Human Rights Council in September 2013.

Elections

An interim presidential election was held on 21 February. This concluded the first phase of political transition and led to the inauguration on 25 February of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, Yemen's first new head of state in over 33 years. This election, brought forward from the scheduled date of 2013, saw significant turnout, and gave President Hadi the mandate to lead Yemen through the next two years of transition.

Yemen now looks forward to its first full presidential election since 2006 at the end of the second and final phase of transition in early 2014. Parliamentary elections, not held since 2003, are also scheduled to take place at the same time. To ensure the full turnout of all eligible voters, it is imperative that the Yemeni electoral commission, established in November, urgently begins work to update the register of voters. This will ensure an inclusive process which reflects the choices of all Yemenis. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UK Department for International Development aim to provide funds and logistical support.

Freedom of expression and assembly

There has been a reduction in the frequency of the mass demonstrations seen in 2011 and in the levels of violence and threats directed at protesters and journalists. Nevertheless, there have been cases of restrictions and violations, and an unspecified number of political activists remain in custody in both private and government-run centres. The government has not provided a list of those currently in detention. Frequent small-scale protests have continued, principally calling for the revocation of the immunity law which makes former President Saleh and his officials free from prosecution.

We welcome reports of the increase of human rights non-governmental associations, but are concerned about alleged interference by the licensing authority when assessing the registration of groups promoting the cause of accountability and transitional justice.

Yemen is ranked 171st out of 179 countries by Reporters Without Borders in their Press Freedom Index. Reporters highlighted in September an escalation of violence towards journalists, in particular against both foreign and Yemeni camera crews covering demonstrations. The visiting OHCHR mission in June pointed to the lack of police intervention to uphold the right to the freedom to peaceful protest during clashes in Aden and Mukalla. There were reports of at least 25 cases of attacks on journalists including illegal arrests, and the looting and disruption of a number of media outlets.

Human rights defenders

Many of those detained for political reasons in 2011 have been released, but many remain in both government and opposition prisons.

Britain supports Yemen's vibrant and growing civil society. Embassy officials regularly meet human rights defenders in Sana'a, and Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt met groups of political activists both during a visit to Yemen in March and in the margins of the Friends of Yemen meeting in New York in September.

Access to justice and the rule of law

There is widespread mistrust of judicial institutions for their lack of accountability, independence and professionalism. With a change in government, and the start of the universally welcomed political transition, there is an opportunity for wholesale reform.

The UK is playing a key role in EU-led support to the government of Yemen on reform of the civilian security sector. We have seconded a senior UK police officer to the EU Delegation in Sana'a to work with the Yemeni authorities and other partners on the restructuring of the Ministry of Interior and police. In particular, the focus is on EU policing initiatives to strengthen the rule of law, work to counter corruption, and the use of forensic and other scientific evidence to reduce reliance on forced confessions.

Corruption in Yemen is endemic and an obstacle to development and justice. A key feature of the Friends of Yemen meeting in September was the agreement on creating the Mutual Accountability Framework, incorporating the implementation of reforms to increase levels of professionalism and efficiency in the ministries responsible for planning and finance.

Death penalty

Yemen continues to use the death penalty and on 3 December executed an alleged juvenile prisoner, Hind al-Barti, despite international protests.

The UK, in coordination with the EU, will continue to take every opportunity to oppose the death penalty as a matter of principle, and especially the application of the death penalty in respect of crimes committed when a suspect is a juvenile. We will make a formal appeal to the government to suspend all pending executions.

Torture

Some arrests were made in connection with the 2011 sniper attack on protesters in Sana'a and also the attack on the presidential mosque. However, the OHCHR has expressed concern at reports of the use of torture following meetings with detainees at a Political Security Organisation (PSO) prison. Yemeni and international human rights NGOs have indicated that the real perpetrators of this incident are not in custody and question the rigour of investigations.

Whilst the Yemeni authorities have responded to calls for the release of those detained in 2011, there is still no official list of all those held. It is likely that a number, perhaps a few hundred, are still in government-run or private detention centres. Reporting by international and local NGOs, in addition to the OHCHR following interviews with detainees, show a

continuing trend of mistreatment and occasional torture. Detention without recourse to mistreatment is complicated in Yemen as a result of Yemeni security organs operating in the margins of the law and without parliamentary oversight. The OHCHR received reports of arbitrary arrests, prolonged incarceration without trial, secret or incommunicado detention, torture and mistreatment.

Whilst Somalis are recognised as *prima facie* refugees in Yemen, other nationalities, including Eritreans and Ethiopians, are alleged to be subject to arrest on arrival, torture and degrading treatment. Others are kidnapped and abused by criminal gangs able to operate with apparent impunity in a country with porous borders and weak immigration controls.

Conflict and protection of civilians

The government has sought to reduce tension between government forces and the armed opposition. In addition, President Hadi has followed through on his promise to address the threat of violent extremism. There have been notable achievements in Abyan, in the south, from April to June when key towns and cities were retaken from Ansar al-Sharia, an affiliate of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Following the offensive, approximately 80,000 internally displaced persons were able to return to their homes.

Women's rights

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index for 2012, Yemen remains bottom, ranked 135 out of 135 countries. Yet the political transition promises an opportunity for Yemeni women to participate in the National Dialogue and contribute directly to the debate on constitutional reform, which may have a positive effect on future legal protection for Yemeni women and promote their role in all parts of society. The transition plan stipulates that 30% of delegates must be women. Furthermore, in November we saw the new electoral commission include female Yemeni judges, in accordance with the government's pledge to promote the participation of women in public life.

The UK ensured the inclusion in September's Human Rights Council Resolution of a paragraph encouraging the government to continue efforts to ensure that women are represented in all levels of the political process and are able to participate in public life, free from intimidation and discrimination. We will review developments in 2013.

Children's rights

In June, the annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC) listed the Yemeni armed forces and the breakaway First Armoured Division as parties that recruit and use children. During her visit to Yemen in November, the SRSG was able to secure commitments from the NUG and Abdul Malik Badraldeen al-Houthi, the leader of the Zaidi al-Houthi sect in the north of Yemen, to end the recruitment and use of children by the Yemeni Armed Forces. The next UN report on violations against children by parties to conflict is expected in March 2013, and the SRSG is set to update the UN on developments in June.

There is no minimum age for marriage in Yemen, and girls are married as young as eight. Current legislation includes a provision that forbids sex with underage brides until "they are suitable for sexual intercourse", an age that is undefined. Recent studies in Yemen have

indicated that a quarter of all girls were married before the age of 15. The problem of child marriage in Yemen is politically contentious; the government does not promote public awareness campaigns on the negative effects of child marriage. A 2009 law setting the minimum age for marriage at 17 was repealed in 2010 due to pressure from traditionalist elements of Yemeni society and no attempt has been made to reintroduce legislation setting a minimum age for marriage. Yemeni law prohibits FGM, and government health workers and officials discourage the practice. The Women's National Committee and the Ministry for Endowments and Religious Guidance have published a manual for religious leaders on women's health issues, including the negative effects of FGM. However, FGM remains a problem and is pervasive in coastal areas of Yemen with reported rates as high as 90%.

Poverty and the right to an adequate standard of living

Yemen remains the poorest country in the Middle East, and according to the UNDP Human Development Index is ranked 154, placing it in the lowest level. A survey by the World Food Programme (WFP) concluded that Yemen suffers from rising levels of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition. Around 10 million Yemenis do not have the food that they need each day – a stark increase of nearly 50% since 2011, with five million in urgent need of food assistance. Thirteen million people are without access to safe water or sanitation and five million have no access to healthcare. Conflict and political unrest in the north and south of Yemen have disrupted the provision of basic services and resulted in over 500,000 internally displaced persons. Instability in the Abyan in the south caused 200,000 Yemenis to flee violence and seek shelter in and around Aden – often in schools, thereby disrupting the provision of education. Many have now returned to their homes.

The UK has responded by increasing its humanitarian aid to £33 million, making it the third-largest donor behind the US and the EU. UK assistance, delivered through UN agencies and NGOs, targets sectors including food, nutrition, healthcare, safe water, education, protection and livelihood support. Of the $585 million needed under the 2012 UN Humanitarian Response Plan, only 57% was funded. The plan for 2013 has increased to $716 million, a clear demonstration that the situation remains critical. As part of the UK's wider support, DFID announced a three-year operational plan worth £196 million, dedicated to development and promoting human rights.

The UK will co-host the fifth Friends of Yemen meeting in London in March 2013 and will encourage increased contributions to the latest UN Humanitarian Appeal.

Zimbabwe

The human rights situation in Zimbabwe remained relatively stable throughout 2012. Although serious problems remain, overall human rights protection has improved since the Government of National Unity (GNU) took office in 2009. Reports from reputable civil society groups continue to show a year-on-year decrease in cases of human rights violations since 2008. Figures from the Zimbabwe Peace Project show a steady decrease in the number of incidents reported, from 23,755 in 2008 to 10,188 in 2011. There were 5,096 incidents recorded in 2012.

The government has enhanced the national framework for the protection of human rights, including by enacting the Electoral Amendment Bill and the Human Rights Commission Bill. At the 19th session of the UN Human Rights Council in March, Zimbabwe accepted 115 out of 177 recommendations made by member states during Zimbabwe's first Universal Periodic Review process in October 2011. In May, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, visited Zimbabwe, the first visit of its kind. However, although the human rights situation is relatively calm compared to the peak of 2008, there are signs that it is starting to deteriorate as elections draw near. We remain concerned by reports that state-led low-level politically motivated harassment of human rights activists and political figures remains prevalent and appears to be increasing as we enter 2013.

In 2012, the UK Government continued to pursue our policy of supporting the aspirations of the Zimbabwean people for a more democratic, stable and prosperous Zimbabwe. We worked closely with reformers in Zimbabwe and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) towards reforms needed for free and fair elections. There has been incremental progress on the constitution-making process and human rights reforms. The EU Targeted Measures have been used to support this process, by placing the onus on the government to live up to its commitments under the Global Political Agreement (GPA). Our Embassy in Harare has worked closely with NGOs, human rights defenders, the EU and other diplomatic missions to monitor the human rights situation and coordinate developmental assistance. In addition, the FCO, DFID and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) have collectively allocated £2.5 million to human rights and conflict prevention projects in Zimbabwe.

Constitutionally, elections must take place in Zimbabwe before the end of October 2013. This is likely to prompt a deterioration of the human rights situation. Full implementation of the GPA ahead of elections will be important if Zimbabwe is to address its human rights record and make further democratic advances.

In 2013, we will continue to help the Zimbabwean people in creating a more democratic Zimbabwe in which human rights are respected. We will support SADC as it continues to encourage the parties to reach agreement on the constitution. We will maintain support and pressure so that the GNU fulfils its obligation to enact essential reform and restore internationally accepted human rights standards in Zimbabwe.

Elections

It is important that essential reforms are completed before elections are held if Zimbabwe is to avoid a repeat of the violence of 2008. We therefore welcome South Africa and SADC's lead in helping the parties to overcome their differences and implement the GPA. We are encouraged by the communiqué that followed the SADC Summit in Luanda in May, which re-emphasised the need for political reforms, including a new constitution, before any elections take place in Zimbabwe.

The past year saw some progress on reforms outlined in the roadmap for credible elections. The Electoral Amendment Bill was passed into law on 28 September. This bill aims to enhance transparency around voter registration and the voter roll. It sets out more stringent guidelines for elections and states that results must be announced within five days, which should lead to a more transparent process. However, there are concerns that the introduction of polling station-based voting may make intimidation easier to coordinate, and that millions of expatriate Zimbabweans have been disenfranchised.

A draft constitution, produced by the Constitutional Select Committee (COPAC) and agreed by all three party negotiators, was discussed at the Second All-Party Stakeholder Conference on 21–23 October. There are a number of stages this process still needs to go through, but a referendum is expected early in 2013. So far, the Department for International Development (DFID) has provided £1 million of support for the constitution-making process via the UN Development Programme through a joint fund with 10 other donors.

There are already signs of an increase in low-level intimidation and violence towards political opponents in the build-up to elections. NGOs and civil society organisations have been harassed and threatened and the Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai (MDC-T) Cabinet Minister for Energy and Power Development was arrested in October for allegedly insulting the President. The Governor of Masvingo Province accused 29 NGOs of ignoring calls to renew their annual registration and subsequently suspended them, and the Minister for Mines and the Zimbabwe Attorney General accused pro-democracy civil society groups of damaging Zimbabwe's interests and threatened that this would no longer be tolerated.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Despite requirements in Zimbabwe's current Constitution and the Police Act for police officers to maintain a clear division between their duties and their political affiliations, the police force often act in a partisan fashion. The police regularly invoke and misuse repressive legislation, including the Public Order and Security Act and the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act, for political purposes to prevent and break up protests and rallies organised by the MDC political parties and civil society groups.

Examples of politically motivated policing include the assault and arrest of eight MDC-T activists outside the MDC-T headquarters in Harare. The day after High Commissioner Pillay's visit, an MDC-T rally in the Mudzi district of Mashonaland was violently disrupted by alleged ZANU PF supporters, resulting in the death of the local MDC ward Chairperson. Seven other MDC members received treatment for injuries. The EU issued a statement condemning the violence and urging the police and Attorney General's office to bring the

alleged perpetrators and instigators to justice. The British Ambassador has raised this incident and expressed her concerns to ZANU PF leaders.

Media freedom remains restricted. The main source of information to rural Zimbabwe is state broadcast media, which is under the control of ZANU PF. A number of new daily newspapers report independently, but these newspapers are predominately available in urban areas. Independent journalists continue to be harassed. Several were targeted in 2012, including the editor of *Daily News*.

Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders were harassed by the state sporadically in 2012, often beaten and arrested on false charges. A case that has been ongoing for some time is that of Abel Chikomo, the executive director of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, who was served with a summons to stand trial for running an "unregistered" organisation.

On 5 November, the police raided the offices of the Civil Society Organisation (CSO), Counselling Services Unit (CSU); they arrested staff and confiscated documents and a computer. On 12 December, the police raided the Harare offices of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights), the ZimRights Education and Programmes Manager was arrested and accused of conducting illegal voter registration and is still in police custody. These incidents raised growing fears amongst many civil society organisations of a crackdown on human rights groups and CSOs in Zimbabwe in advance of elections.

The Civil Society organisation Woman of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) has faced repeated restrictions on its freedom of expression and assembly. In February, police intervened to break up a demonstration by WOZA members outside the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC) office; nine WOZA members were arrested and charged with criminal nuisance. In July, nine more members of WOZA were arrested in Bulawayo for writing political messages on a road; eight of the members were convicted and one was acquitted. A High Court appeal has been submitted to challenge this sentence.

Access to justice and the rule of law

A culture of impunity is widespread in Zimbabwe. Victims of violence are rarely able to rely on the police to pursue justice on their behalf. Court cases in Zimbabwe take a long time to proceed and are regularly postponed. Selective application and interpretation by law enforcement officials and the Attorney General's office limit access to justice and the freedoms of political actors opposed to ZANU PF.

Two MDC-T MPs were arrested for insulting the President. MDC-T Deputy Treasurer General and Cabinet Minister Elton Mangoma were arrested five months after the alleged incident, and 10 days before the second All-Party Stakeholder Conference, suggesting that the intent was to intimidate key political figures before crucial constitutional negotiations.

We reported last year that a police officer was murdered in Glen View on 29 May 2011. The trial of 29 MDC-T members who were arrested for this incident began in early June. After 18 months in a remand prison, three members were granted bail in November, with a further 21 members granted bail in December. Five members still remain in detention.

However, 2012 saw some positive court cases. In January, Calbin Ncube, Mpumelelo Donga and Gift Mlala's long-running case, for allegedly possessing cartoons that insulted President Mugabe, ended in acquittal. Additionally, the MDC-T MP for Chipinge South, Meki Makuyana, successfully appealed against his 2009 conviction for kidnapping and has resumed his parliamentary duties. Finally, in May, Moses Mzila-Ndlovu, the Minister of Healing, was acquitted of communicating false statements whilst addressing a Gukhurundi memorial meeting.

The Human Rights Commission Bill was passed into law on 12 October. The Act empowers the nine independent Human Rights Commissioners to investigate human rights violations from February 2009 onwards, and empowers the independent commission to investigate, and refer to the Attorney General, cases of politically motivated violence and intimidation ahead of elections, as well as electoral manipulation on and after polling day. Whilst this has been welcomed, significant challenges to its implementation remain. In December, the Chair of the Human Rights commission resigned in protest at lack of resources and progress.

Death penalty

Zimbabwe still has the death penalty but has observed a moratorium since 2005 when the last execution was carried out. The last death sentence issued was in 2010. There were 58 people on death row at the end of 2012. The current draft constitution abolishes the death sentence for women altogether, and for men under 21 and above 70 years old.

Torture

There is currently no specific crime of torture defined in Zimbabwean law. Allegations of torture are regularly made against police for their interrogation practices, and the security sector allegedly continues to use torture during politically motivated interrogations. Many human rights defenders claim to have experienced torture by members of the police force. For instance, in another WOZA case 17 members were arrested on 19 January and were allegedly tortured by officers at Donnington police station. Six members were made to sit on "air chairs" and police put a plastic bag over the head of one. We welcome the announcement in February by the Minister for Justice Patrick Chinamasa that the government will ratify the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).

Freedom of religion or belief

Zimbabwe generally displays religious tolerance. However, the treatment of the Anglican Church over recent years was an exception. On 19 November, the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe ruled in favour of the Anglican Church in the dioceses of Harare and Manicaland, ordering that property appropriated by the "rogue" Bishop Nolbert Kunonga be returned to its rightful owners. The court's judgment is perceived as a major success for freedom of religion in Zimbabwe and for the Anglican Communion, who have been battling against Kunonga in the courts since 2009. The judgment has been welcomed worldwide, including in the UK.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

Homosexuality remains illegal in Zimbabwe. President Robert Mugabe often refers disparagingly to gay people in his speeches. The rights of homosexuals are not openly discussed due to the stigma associated with homosexuality. LGBT people remain a marginalised and stigmatised group.

On 11 August, police raided the offices of the NGO Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), following the launch of their "Violations Report" and public briefing on the constitution. In total, 44 members of the group were assaulted, detained and denied access to lawyers, before being released without charge. GALZ offices were raided again on 20 August. GALZ have been charged with running an illegal organisation and are due to be called to court.

Land/farm invasions

President Mugabe's land reform programme continues to cause suffering to the remaining white farmers, their families and workers. Many face continued intimidation and harassment, and 210 white commercial farmers are under prosecution for refusing to vacate farms allocated for redistribution. We continue to raise our concerns with the government and highlight our support for a fair, transparent and pro-poor land reform programme. We encourage Zimbabwe to carry out a land audit leading to land property rights, and stand ready to support this process, if credible. On a positive note, there are reports that ZANU PF has admitted to its obligation to pay compensation to farmers who were victims of the land reform programme (where they are nationals of countries with a Bilateral Investment Protection Agreement with Zimbabwe). ZANU PF has further admitted the illegality of the seizure of many of the farms.

Marange diamond fields

Local NGOs such as the Marange-based NGO the Chiadzwa Community Development Trust continued to highlight human rights abuses in the diamond-mining areas of Marange. They reported several cases of abuse towards the local communities within Marange, including intimidation, threats of violence and allegations about suspicious deaths. Police and private security companies are often implicated in cases involving persons who are allegedly mining illegally. NGOs are often threatened and prevented from accessing the areas to monitor the human rights situation. In November, the Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association (ZELA) withdrew their operations from Marange as a result of sustained threats and intimidation.

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