



## Suggested FCDO Questions – March 2024

### Contents

<b>British Nationals arbitrarily detained abroad</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Hong Kong</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>India</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Bulldozer Injustice .....	2
Crackdown on Civil Society .....	3
<b>Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories</b> .....	<b>3</b>
International Humanitarian Law .....	3
The Occupied West Bank .....	3
<b>Russia</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Sudan</b> .....	<b>5</b>

### British Nationals arbitrarily detained abroad

#### Substantive question:

- What steps his department is taking to secure the immediate and unconditional release of British nationals Alaa Abdel Fattah who is arbitrarily detained in Egypt and Mehran Raof arbitrarily detained in Iran?

#### Background:

Alaa Abdel Fattah, a British National, is a writer and a father who is unjustly imprisoned in Egypt. He has been an advocate for human rights in the country, and has been detained for his human rights work. In 2022, Alaa went on hunger strike to protest his detention and the UK government’s lack of action to release him.

Mehran Raof, a British-Iranian national and a labour rights activist, is being arbitrarily detained in Tehran’s Evin prison. Revolutionary Guards agents arrested him on 16 October 2020. In August 2021, Raof was sentenced to ten years and eight months on national security-related charges after a grossly unfair trial. He is being held in prolonged solitary confinement, in violation of the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. He is a prisoner of conscience and must be immediately and unconditionally released.

### Hong Kong

#### Substantive question:

- Will he make a statement on the proposed Article 23 and its human rights impact in Hong Kong?

#### Background



On the 30th January 2024, the Hong Kong government commenced the [one-month public consultation period for Article 23](#), the city's long-contested locally legislated national security instrument that proposes to [prohibit a new set of vaguely and broadly defined national security offences](#), including treason, sedition, theft of state secrets and external interference. The government also proposes to prohibit foreign political organisations or bodies from conducting political activities in Hong Kong, and to prohibit political organisations or bodies of Hong Kong from establishing ties with foreign political organisations or bodies, which will likely sever international collaboration and exchanges between civil society and political actors.

Although it is not yet clear how the Bill will be worded or the proposed penalties for new or amended offences, there is concern [from both Hong Kong and international civil society actors](#) on the human rights impacts of Article 23 on citizens, diaspora activists and foreign nationals. Amnesty International believes this is “[a dangerous moment for human rights](#)” and are concerned on the Article's intention to step up the crackdown on civic freedoms and civil society organising and deter legitimate exercise of rights in the name of national security.

The existing National Security Law, which was enacted in 2020, has been used to persecute human rights activists, politicians, journalists and civil society groups. It has severely restricted freedom of speech and put anyone in Hong Kong who participates in protests at imminent risk of prosecution. The law has already led to the [closure of approximately 100 NGO and civil society groups](#).

The Hong Kong authorities are likely to push through the legislation of Article 23 with minimal meaningful consultation and public engagement, and without ensuring its compliance with international human rights law.

## India

### Bulldozer Injustice

#### Substantive questions:

- What steps he is taking to prevent arbitrary demolitions of homes and businesses in India?
- What assessment has he made of the role of British companies involved in 'Bulldozer Injustice' in India?

#### Background

On 7 February, Amnesty International released two companion reports calling for the immediate end of India's widespread unlawful demolitions of Muslims' homes, businesses and places of worship through the use of JCB bulldozers and other machines.

The two reports — [‘If you speak up, your house will be demolished’: Bulldozer Injustice in India’](#) and [‘Unearthing Accountability: JCB's Role and Responsibility in Bulldozer Injustice in India’](#) — document the punitive demolition of Muslim properties in at least five states, with a widespread use of JCB-branded bulldozers or diggers as brand of choice in a hate campaign against the minority community. These demolitions are carried out with widespread impunity as was evident from the [Mira Road demolitions](#) after a Ram Temple Rally turned violent earlier last month in Mumbai, India.

*“The authorities have repeatedly undermined the rule of law, destroying homes, businesses or places of worship, through targeted campaigns of hate, harassment, violence and the weaponization of JCB bulldozers. These human rights abuses must be urgently addressed.” Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General.*



This is not the first time JCB has been referenced in Amnesty International research. In 2021, Amnesty published a major report '[JCB Off Track](#)' which outlined how JCB had not taken adequate steps within its power and capacity to prevent its equipment from being used to demolish Palestinian homes and construct Israeli settlements, in breach of its responsibilities under international human rights standards.

## Crackdown on Civil Society

### Substantive questions:

- What assessment has he made of the ability of civil society voices to meaningfully engage in India?
- If he will make a statement on the importance of civil society ahead of the upcoming elections in India.

### Background:

The upcoming elections are against a backdrop of a human rights crisis that has only deepened since India took its seat at the UN Human Rights Council. Since then, the government has ramped up its crackdown on civil society, arbitrarily detaining and prosecuting rights defenders and critics of the government on spurious charges, and using laws on foreign funding and other legislation to shut down civil society organizations. In this time, the government has continued to fuel discrimination and violence against minorities and persons from other marginalized groups in the country.

Most recently, [Amnesty International reported](#) that the right to peaceful protest is under threat due to the escalating crackdown by the Indian Authorities on the 'Dilli Chalo' peaceful march of farmers, where, according to official police sources, at least 4,500 tear gas grenades were used against the protestors.

## Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

### International Humanitarian Law

#### Substantive question:

- What assessment has he made of Israel's commitment to abide by international humanitarian law?

#### Background

On 12 February 2024 Amnesty International published new [evidence](#) of unlawful Israeli attacks in Gaza, which killed at least 95 civilians, including 42 children. This evidence, providing yet more proof of Israel's continuing flouting of international humanitarian law, underlines the urgent need for the UK government to not only do all in its power to secure an immediate ceasefire by all parties to the conflict, but also for it to take meaningful action to hold Israeli authorities accountable for their actions, which include war crimes, crimes against humanity and a plausible risk of genocide (as identified by the International Court of Justice (ICJ)).

### The Occupied West Bank

#### Substantive question:

- What assessment has he made of Israel's policy and practices in the West Bank?

#### Background



On 5 February 2024 Amnesty International published shocking [analysis](#) of a brutal wave of violence against Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank. Between 7 October and 31 December 2023, 299 Palestinians were killed, marking a 50% increase compared to the first nine months of the year. 2023 was already the deadliest year for Palestinians since the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) began recording casualties in 2005.

Israel's brutal repression in the Occupied West Bank is a feature of its crime against humanity of apartheid, which also includes Israel's policy and practice of settling its civilians in occupied Palestinian territory. This displacement of the local population violates the Fourth Geneva Convention and constitutes a war crime. It has also resulted in other grave human rights violations against Palestinians: forcible displacement, land confiscation, demolition of homes and structures, and discrimination.

## Russia

### Substantive question:

- What assessment has he made of Amnesty International's most recent statement about the surge in abuse of anti-terrorism laws to suppress dissent in Russia?

### Background:

In [an eight-page briefing](#) published on 19 February, Amnesty International demonstrates that there has been a **disturbing escalation in the abuse of vague anti-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation in Russia**, which has intensified since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. [The briefing "Terrorising the dissent"](#) documents how Russia's authorities have increasingly targeted dissenters and peaceful protesters under the guise of "national security."

Since 2013, 3,738 people have been convicted of terrorism-related crimes. Notably, more than 90% of these convictions did not arise in relation to terrorist attacks, committed or planned, but rather various other actions such as purported "justification of terrorism." And for these, convictions have increased 50-fold during the last 10 years. No one charged with terrorism-related offences has been acquitted since at least 2015, when the statistics first became available. As of December 2023, the Federal Financial Monitoring Service's "List of Terrorists and Extremists" included 13,647 people, with 11,286 labelled as "terrorists." Of them, 13% were women and 106 were under 18 years old.

The expansion of Russia's anti-terrorism and anti-extremism laws, including the 2006 criminalization of "justification of terrorism" and the 2023 proposal to criminalize the "justification of extremism" further blurs the lines between terrorism and extremism – neither of which are well defined in international law, and both of which are frequently weaponized to stifle dissent.

*"These steps demonstrate a systematic approach to broaden definitions and penalties, stifling political opposition and freedom of expression under the guise of 'national security',"* Oleg Kozlovsky, Amnesty International's Russia Researcher

A stark example is the designation of **Aleksei Navalny's NGO Anti-Corruption Foundation** as an "extremist organization," effectively criminalizing one of the most vocal civil initiatives in Russia. Individuals who donated money to this and similar groups, taken part in them or shared their materials – even before their arbitrary designation as extremist – are now at risk of criminal charges and long imprisonment.



## Sudan

### Substantive question:

- What assessment has he made of the current level of funding to the UN's Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan 2024?
- Will he make a statement on the need for more concerted political effort in Sudan?

### Background

The [OCHA Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan 2024](#) is concerning only at 3.5% of its required funding level. There is an urgent need for more visibility and political focus on Sudan to encourage more humanitarian support, support for action to protect civilians and to ensure accountability for crimes under International Law.

2023 saw an escalation in violence take place in April after weeks of tensions between the RSF and the SAF over security force reform during negotiations for a new transitional government.

In a report published in August, [‘Death Came To Our Home’: War Crimes and Civilian Suffering In Sudan](#), Amnesty International documented extensive war crimes being committed by the SAF and RSF in the conflict. Many ethnic Masalit people who fled to Chad from West Darfur told Amnesty International that their towns had been attacked by RSF and heavily armed Arab militias in ethnically motivated violence.

In November, Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied Arab militias in Ardamata carried out a series of ethnically motivated attacks in West Darfur that killed and injured hundreds of civilians. Men, women, and children belonging predominantly to the Masalit community were targeted, along with some members of other non-Arab tribes. [Witnesses and survivors described harrowing scenes to Amnesty International](#), including accounts of how civilians were executed in their homes, on the streets and while attempting to flee.

As stated emphatically by Tigere Chagutah, Amnesty International's Regional Director for East and Southern Africa: *“The ongoing lack of accountability for past crimes is one of the root causes of this renewed violence. The cycles of horror must be broken, and those responsible for crimes against civilians must be held to account. Humanitarian actors must be allowed to deliver unimpeded aid to West Darfur. All countries must also fully respect the UN Security Council's arms embargo on Darfur and refrain from sending weapons and ammunitions to armed actors in Darfur,”*