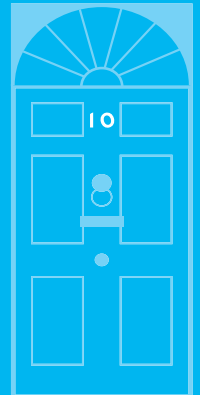


# A HUMAN RIGHTS MANIFESTO:

## Amnesty International UK's proposals for the next UK government



The UK will head to the polls for the first general election since 2019 on 4 July. Much has happened over the last four and a half years. At home, we have seen a huge rollback in human rights protections. From the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, the Nationality and Borders Act and the Troubles Act to the Illegal Migration Act and Safety of Rwanda Act, the Victims and Prisoners Act and the Public Order Act, our fundamental rights have been chipped away, often in contradiction to the UK's obligations under international law. The denial of structural inequalities, scapegoating of minorities and denigration of those fighting for a better world in the public sphere have fostered a climate of fear and hostility.

On the global stage, Amnesty International has been warning for more than a decade of a persistent deterioration in respect for human rights and the rule of law. Recent years have seen new, renewed and protracted conflicts that have led to appalling civilian suffering, including Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and a devastating escalation of the decades-long crisis in Israel and Gaza. These have triggered extensive human rights, humanitarian and displacement crises, including the very real risk of genocide against Palestinians. States around the world are also continuing to repress universal freedoms, to the extent that in 2023 the CIVICUS Monitor found that 70 per cent of the world's population now live in repressed or completely closed societies, the highest percentage since 2018 when CIVICUS started monitoring civic space around the world.<sup>1</sup>

A fundamental change of direction is needed and a general election provides an opportunity for this to take place. If the UK is to be seen again as a champion of human rights, the next government must be elected on a mandate that is ambitious and progressive with regards to rights protections. It is an essential task, but not an easy one, which is why Amnesty International UK has created a human rights manifesto – a range of commitments that we are calling on political parties to adopt and deliver should they form the next UK government.

Our manifesto for the next UK government covers a broad range of human rights issues across home and foreign affairs.

<sup>1</sup> [monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings\\_2023/innumbers](https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2023/innumbers)

## The promotion and protection of rights in the UK

The next UK government **should protect and expand the rights of people in the UK.** It should:

- **Champion our membership of the European Convention on Human Rights and fully respect the Human Rights Act.**

Promoting the Human Rights Act (HRA) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is the right thing to do. Encouraging understanding of – and support for – human rights is also the sensible thing for any government wanting to rebuild trust in the political system. A government that champions human rights protections is one that is open to scrutiny, open to change and committed to transparency. Moreover, the potential to incorporate other further rights into domestic law – as proposed in the Labour Party's Report of the Commission on the UK's Future or through the process championed by the Scottish government – will only make sense to the public if existing rights protections and the principles underpinning them are meaningfully and extensively championed. In this way understanding and support for all rights must be increased.

Promoting rights must also encompass the whole of government, not be siloed off into a policy concern for the Ministry of Justice alone. While it would be a welcome change to have a secretary of state for justice actively and consistently championing the ECHR and the HRA, this will be undermined if other government departments and ministers are engaging in contradictory actions and rhetoric. The next UK government will face difficult and contentious policy decisions and a host of political pressures. These issues must be addressed in ways that are effective and fully comply with human rights standards. Crucially, the fundamental human rights principles of universality and indivisibility must be upheld, championed and consistently applied. The next UK government should commit to removing any legislation or specific provisions that undermine

▶ universality and/or disapply the Human Rights Act. For example, the Illegal Migration and Safety of Rwanda Acts or sections 71-74 of the Victims and Prisoners Act.

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- **Apply a new approach to protest laws to safeguard people's rights to freedom of expression and assembly.**

Under international human rights obligations, governments must refrain from introducing measures that place undue restrictions on people's freedom of expression and assembly, including their right to peaceful protest. Peaceful protest by its very nature can be disruptive and human rights law requires that governments refrain from introducing laws that have a 'chilling effect' on people's ability to exercise their rights. Amnesty International UK has long held the view that the police already have more than sufficient powers to manage protest safely within the law and prevent violence from taking place. However, measures contained in the Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 interfere with rights to freedom of expression and assembly in England and Wales, in ways that risk being disproportionate, unnecessary and ultimately unlawful. They include expanding police powers to impose restrictions on protests, hiking up prison sentences for peaceful protest activity, significant expansion of stop-and-search powers related to protests, protest-banning orders and the criminalisation of 'locking on'.

Definitions contained in the anti-protest legislation introduced in 2022 and 2023 are so vague and poorly defined they are likely to lead to highly subjective and inconsistent approaches by the police to different types of protests. This reinforces structural inequalities against overpoliced communities and the increased misuse of those powers. It has already been established that powers such as stop and search reinforce unacceptable levels of institutional racism and are largely counterproductive – they have no or at best marginal effect at preventing and deterring crime while undermining relationships between the police and overtly targeted communities, particularly Black men. Public trust in the police and police accountability have declined significantly over the last five years, which is likely due to several high-profile examples of police misconduct<sup>2</sup>. The powers in the Policing Act and the Public Order Act are likely to further increase mistrust of the police, as they increase the potential for subjective and unnecessary policing decisions and discrimination.

In short, the measures introduced in both the Policing Act and the Public Order Act are neither proportional nor necessary – they are incompatible with our international human rights obligations and should be replaced at

the earliest opportunity with a public order framework that safeguards rights and protects all sections of the public. Doing so would cement the next UK government's commitment to freedom of expression and help rebuild public trust in the police.

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- **Ensure legal aid is accessible to all who need it – particularly those most affected by the cuts – including by repealing the restrictive elements of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.**

Through the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO), the UK government dramatically reduced access to legal aid for tens of thousands of people in England Wales for civil cases. In doing so it stripped away a vital element of support for a fair and just legal system. Those hardest hit by the cuts are some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised people in our society: children and young people; and people with additional vulnerabilities, including mental health problems or disabilities.

Even before the devastating effects of LASPO, civil legal aid was in a highly precarious position. Very low rates combined with a complex and delayed payment processes meant civil legal aid cases were increasingly commercially unviable for legal firms. So-called 'advice deserts' – large areas of the country where there is no legally aided representation available for a range of social issues such as housing, education, welfare and immigration – had developed and were exacerbated by LASPO. Civil legal aid requires legislative change, including repealing the restrictive elements of LASPO, alongside substantial re-investment to ensure that everyone who needs it is able to secure their rights through early and effective legal representation.

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- **Ensure the citizenship rights of all British people are fully and equally respected.**

British citizenship is the nationality of the UK. The British Nationality Act 1981 created this nationality and did so on the basis that it was to be the possession by right of all people connected to the UK. Although the Act does not define connection, it sets out the various circumstances in which a person has a right to British citizenship because they have that connection. Home Office practice, policy and legislation since the passing of the Act have substantially undermined this, causing significant inequality between British people – some of whom dispossessed of their British citizenship, including by measures obstructing or preventing their exercise of rights to be recognised as British citizens – with disproportionately adverse impacts on members of racial and religious minority groups.

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2 [theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/14/more-than-1500-uk-police-officers-accused-of-violence-against-women-in-six-months](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/14/more-than-1500-uk-police-officers-accused-of-violence-against-women-in-six-months)

The next UK government should repair the damage that has been done. For example, it should remove administrative and other barriers and threats – including excessive fees and character requirements for registration of nationality, and excessive powers of citizenship deprivation – to the rights contained in the British Nationality Act 1981. This would restore the nationality rights of all British people and secure equality by ensuring the citizenship of this population was fully and equally shared by all.

### • **Introduce a Racial Equality Bill that recognises and addresses institutional racism.**

Amnesty International UK is calling for legislation to tackle the institutional racism that riddles our society and public bodies. Racism continues to undermine the respect, fulfilment and protection of human rights for racialised communities across the UK. The human rights affected are wide-ranging, covering civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights, and the impact is exacerbated by the denial of the existence of institutional racism. A Racial Equality Bill must set out a bold action plan to undo the damage. It must also ensure any human rights violations are independently investigated in a timely manner and that racialised communities are provided with adequate access to remedy and redress.

### • **Offer human rights education in a range of settings, including as part of the school curriculum.**

Empowering children and young people to learn about human rights is itself a human right, as evidenced in Article 1 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UDHRET), which states that ‘everyone has the right to know, seek and receive information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms and should have access to human rights education and training’. Alongside the fact that a previous UK government has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which recognises that education should develop respect for human rights and prepare the child for life in a free society, this shows an acceptance that human rights education should be a part of every child’s learning journey.

Yet human rights are not taught consistently across all education settings and the subject is often missing from the school curriculum. Recent research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission also shows that teaching students about human rights has benefits for schools: these include teachers reporting reduced prejudice and discrimination among students, improved teacher recruitment and retention, and improved student behaviour.

Relevant, appropriate and inclusive relationship and sex education (RSE) is a vital part of human rights education. The recent instrumentalisation of RSE and attempts to exclude LGBTI content should be an alarm bell for the new government. Supporting children and young people to be safe, establish equal relationships with peers and grow understanding and celebration of difference should be at the heart of RSE. Any change must be evidence based and teachers and schools should have more resources and support to strengthen the high quality RSE education they are already delivering.

The next UK government should ensure that human rights education in England is offered in a range of settings, including as part of the school curriculum. This will ensure that children and young people have their right to human rights education realised and can learn to understand and protect human rights and take part in the world as active citizens.

### • **Introduce a cabinet-level ministerial role that focuses specifically on human rights and works across government.**

The next UK government should recognise that meaningfully championing human rights and ensuring they are fundamental to all government policy requires a cross-departmental approach. Successive UK governments have undermined their own actions by promoting human rights through the policy of one department while violating those same rights through the policy of another. For example, increasing humanitarian funding to respond to the crisis in Gaza, while continuing to license arms sales to Israel and thereby facilitating ongoing human rights violations. There are numerous other examples, particularly relating to the UK undermining rights protections at home (including the Policing Act and the Public Order Act) while attempting to promote adherence to human rights obligations abroad.

There have been many instances of ministerial and cross-ministerial approaches to leadership on human rights: for example, a cross-departmental minister on women’s rights working across the then Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence; and a minister for human rights who sat across the Department for Trade and the FCDO. However, none had the necessary resources and authority to ensure a consistent application and promotion of rights across government. In order to ensure human rights and the international rule of law truly are fundamental to everything the next UK government does, all parties should commit to the creation of a cabinet-level ministerial role that focuses specifically on human rights and works across government.

- **Make economic and social rights a reality backed up in law and policy by incorporating the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.**

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) covers rights that are fundamental to the creation of a more just and equal society that respects and protects human dignity and freedoms. Full incorporation would institute a fundamental shift in the UK's approach to these rights and secure them for the long term. All parties should commit to being bold and incorporating the whole range of ICESCR rights into domestic law.

- **Tackle all forms of homelessness by protecting the right to housing through system-wide action.**
- **Increase availability of social homes.**
- **Remove eligibility conditions that deny thousands of people access to housing.**
- **Invest in cross-departmental action to prevent and support people out of homelessness.**

Homelessness in England has been framed as 'a lifestyle choice', laying the blame on the people affected. In reality, homelessness is rising rapidly due to inadequate government action to address the availability and affordability of decent housing. This crisis is exacerbated by a fall in real incomes, and benefit cuts. These policy choices make adequate and affordable housing inaccessible for those living in or on the brink of poverty.

The next UK government should take urgent steps and prepare a roadmap with concrete targets to fulfil unmet housing needs, including by fulfilling the recommendation of the parliamentary Levelling Up and Housing Committee, its predecessor the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, and major housing and homelessness charities, including Shelter, Crisis and the National Housing Federation, to build at least 90,000 social homes in England a year. Regulation of housing quality against standards such as the 'Decent Homes Standard' should be applied across all forms of housing including private rentals and temporary accommodation to prevent the damage to health caused by things like damp and mould.

The next UK government should abolish the criteria of 'priority need' and 'intentionality' for determining entitlement to housing in England; and ensure that everyone who is homeless and unable to provide for themselves is provided with housing while prioritising those most at risk of abuse, exploitation and other

human rights violations. It should also take steps, including through amendments to immigration legislation, to ensure that every person regardless of immigration status is able to avoid homelessness.

The effects of homelessness ripple through people's lives, impacting on their physical and mental health. Prevention and supporting people out of homelessness requires cross-departmental action and resourcing. People with lived experience of homelessness should be meaningfully involved in finding policy solutions to end it.

- **Reform the UK social security system to ensure an adequate standard of living and respect for the principle of human dignity.**

The Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights stresses the importance of ensuring that income protection is sufficient to enable people to afford essentials such as housing and food and thereby prevents or alleviates poverty. The UK government has been criticised by the UN and the International Labour Organisation for failing to apply a 'social protection floor' or minimum level for welfare benefits and for failing to regularly review benefit levels through transparent procedures. Joseph Rowntree Foundation research indicates that the inadequacy of benefits is causing significant hardship within the UK (for example, driving unprecedented numbers of people to foodbanks). Moreover, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recently reiterated concerns that government policy choices embed a punitive system of assessment and sanctions which degrade the human dignity and mental wellbeing of claimants.

The new UK government must prioritise an urgent review of welfare legislation and procedure to embed both a transparent process through which social security payments are set at a level which is enough for an adequate standard of living, and transforms the systems and culture of the Department for Work and Pensions so that it preserves human dignity and the wellbeing of people who need assistance.

### ▶ **Rights, safety and choice for all women and girls**

The next UK government should **protect and strengthen the rights of all women and girls**. It should:

- **Decriminalise abortion in England and Wales.**
- **Ensure ongoing access to human rights-compliant abortion provision, and safeguarding against any rollback in these protections, particularly in Northern Ireland.**

While abortion in England, Wales and Scotland is accessible, it remains a crime potentially carrying a life sentence at any gestation under a law passed in 1861, the Offences Against Persons Act (OAPA), and common law equivalent in Scotland. For many reasons, some women, girls and pregnant people may have an abortion outside the requirements – for example, they might be in a coercive relationship or living in extreme poverty. Rather than being supported at one of the most difficult times in their lives, the OAPA means they face possible prosecution. This is not a theoretical issue: in June 2023 a woman was sentenced to 28 months in prison for taking abortion pills past the legal time limit, and over the past eight years at least 17 women have been investigated.

Abortion is healthcare – it should not be treated as a criminal justice matter. The next UK government should fully decriminalise abortion, ensuring other parts of the UK are in line with Northern Ireland, by urgently repealing sections 58 and 59 of the OAPA. In addition, the offence of concealment of birth should also be removed by repealing section 60 of the Act.

In 2019, abortion was decriminalised and made lawful in Northern Ireland. It is now the only part of the UK where this healthcare is decriminalised. Commissioned abortion services are slowly being established. The next UK government should ensure that provision meets its legal obligations and is sustainable, accessible to all and respects and protects choice.

- **Put women's human rights at the centre of international relations and work with partners to hold state and non-state perpetrators to account for violations.**

After decades of slow progress, women's human rights are increasingly under attack across the world. In particular, the right to bodily autonomy is now often used as a political football by misogynist leaders. Afghanistan is perhaps the most extreme example: women's human rights protections have been erased since the Taliban's

2021 takeover. But it is not alone: women's rights are not progressing or are being actively rolled back in Iran, Ethiopia, Hungary, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the USA and other countries. The UK has strategic relationships with many of these states but fails to use sufficient leverage to help curb human rights violations. A successful approach to safeguarding women's rights requires strong policy coherence, which must not waver in the face of economic and trade interests. Foreign policy initiatives in support of the rights of women and girls abroad will also not be credible unless the same principles are put into practice at home.

The next UK government should use all the means at its disposal in multilateral and bilateral relations to protect the rights of women and girls, including their right to sexual and reproductive health, by pressing for the meaningful implementation of existing commitments. In addition, it should lead by example by restoring the overseas aid budget to 0.7 per cent of gross national income, prioritising access to sexual and reproductive health services, including in emergencies, and providing long-term, core and sustainable funding directly to women human rights defenders and their organisations.

To contribute to ending violations of women and girls' rights in, for example, Afghanistan and Iran, the next UK government must use all available means to target perpetrators without affecting the wider population – such as targeted sanctions or travel bans imposed through a UN Security Council resolution – in a coordinated and robust manner. It should also provide strong political and practical support to international justice and accountability mechanisms, consistently supporting every International Criminal Court investigation, including on Afghanistan; and providing adequate resources to allow the Office of the Prosecutor to investigate all crimes perpetrated by all parties to the conflict. Finally, it should have ongoing, meaningful consultations with women human rights defenders and their organisations to learn how it can best support women and girls around the world.

- **Prioritise protection for women and girls (and their dependants) fleeing conflict and persecution.**

Successive UK governments have prided themselves on being global leaders on women's rights. One of the UK's flagship programmes over the past 10 years, the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, aims to prevent sexual violence in conflict, support survivors and hold perpetrators to account. But the UK continues to undermine its efforts by failing to provide safe routes for survivors to travel to the country and running an asylum system that consistently fails victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

▶ As is the case for all people fleeing human rights violations, survivors of gender-based violence and their dependants risk their lives to travel to the UK because there are no safe routes. Those who manage to reach the UK are currently greeted by a government policy that simply attempts to deny them access to the asylum system, leaving them stuck in a huge government-created backlog and at risk of detention, destitution and the threat of expulsion (including to places they do not know). This exacerbates existing trauma and increases survivors' vulnerability to violence.

As part of wider improvements to the asylum system, ensuring all people seeking asylum are treated with dignity and can access a fair process, the next UK government should recognise the evidence showing that most women and girls seeking asylum have been victims of violence, and some of them have been raped, in their country of origin and/or on their journey to the UK.

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• **Strengthen the UK's ability to end domestic violence against all women and girls by ratifying all of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention on violence against women and domestic violence.**

After 10 years, the UK finally ratified the Istanbul Convention, which entered into force on 1 November 2022. Regrettably, the current government applied a reservation to Article 59 on residence status, meaning that migrant victims will continue to be discriminated against by the state when they seek support to escape domestic violence. Despite the government's claims to the contrary, there is ample evidence that, for migrant women who lack independent status, the fear of immigration enforcement is the main barrier to reporting. Perpetrators know this well and use immigration status as a tool to control their victims.

The next UK government should urgently withdraw the reservation and be held accountable for the full implementation of the convention. It should also ensure migrant women are protected without discrimination by ensuring all survivors can access safe housing and support, and guaranteeing safe reporting for victims and witnesses of crimes regardless of their immigration status.

## Protect and promote the rights of all LGBTI+ people

The next UK government should seek to **remove discrimination in law and practice**. It should:

- **Reform the Gender Recognition Act in line with international best practice by removing intrusive and humiliating requirements and move from a medicalised to an administrative process.**
- **Urgently introduce a UK-wide ban on 'conversion therapy' that includes practices targeting all LGBTI+ people.**

The 20th anniversary of the passing of the Gender Recognition Act is in 2024. A landmark piece of legislation at the time, the Act is now desperately out of date and needs reform to reflect international human rights standards. A reformed Act should introduce an administrative system for legal gender recognition, based on a statutory declaration – removing the intrusive, humiliating and bureaucratic process trans people must currently go through to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate. Several countries, including Ireland, Argentina, Norway, Malta and Germany, have already updated their gender recognition legislation in this way. It is for these reasons that Amnesty International UK supports the Gender Recognition Reform Bill passed by the Scottish parliament with cross-party support and opposes the Section 35 action taken by the current UK government to block it.

So-called 'conversion therapy' can constitute torture or cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment – it has no place in our society. 'Praying the gay away' and other pseudo-scientific approaches continue to wreak havoc with the lives of LGBTI+ people. Despite multiple promises LGBTI+ people are still waiting for a ban. We are urging ministers to introduce a trans-inclusive blanket ban on 'conversion therapy' without delay, a ban we want to see replicated across the UK.

The UK is rapidly losing its status as a champion of LGBTI+ rights. It ranks 15th in the 2024 ILGA ranking of European countries' performance on LGBTI+ rights, having been ranked first for a number of consecutive years. This rapid decline is due to a string of failed promises on significant initiatives to improve equality and non-discrimination for LGBTI+ people, including the reform of legal gender recognition, banning 'conversion therapy' and improving the treatment of LGBTI+ asylum seekers.

- ▶ • Tackle the toxic narrative that wrongly pits women's rights against trans rights, including by countering misinformation, sensationalism and the distortion of human rights as a 'zero sum game'.
- Commit to policy and law-making on LGBTI+ rights based on evidence and human rights standards, refuting disinformation and fear-mongering under the banner of so-called 'gender ideology'.
- Resist any attempts to redefine the scope of the term 'sex' in the Equality Act.

The use of the rights of trans people as a political wedge is undermining support for human rights protections as a whole, fostering a rise in hate crime and bringing misery to trans people. Trans women and trans children and young people are especially targeted. In 2022, the police recorded 4,355 hate crimes against trans people in England and Wales, an increase of 56 per cent from the previous year. According to the Home Office, widespread discussion of trans rights issues on social media has likely played a part in this increase.

The impact of a toxic political and public discourse on the rights of trans people has been noted with concern by the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights and the UN independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity in their recent visits to the UK.

The next UK government must put in substantial effort to tackle the notion that the rights of trans people are incompatible with the rights of women and that children are at risk of being 'groomed' by a non-existent 'trans lobby'. This should start with resisting any demands to amend the protected characteristic of 'sex' in the Equality Act 2010 and committing to formulate policies based on solid evidence and in line with human rights standards.

## An immigration system compliant with international law

The next UK government should ensure the UK's immigration system respects the UK's international obligations and promotes equality, justice and human dignity. It should:

- Improve the asylum system, ensuring safe and fair decisions are made in good time on all claims and providing access to adequate legal, housing and financial support.
- Create safe routes so people can avoid or reduce their dependence on people smugglers, human traffickers and dangerous journeys.
- Repeal legislation and withdraw policy that does not comply with international human rights law, including the Illegal Migration Act and provisions of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022. Neither is compatible with the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights and the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

The UK has long been, and remains, a relatively modest recipient of people seeking asylum. Yet the political and media attention given to small boats crossing the Channel has inflamed hostility towards people seeking asylum and led to policies and legislation that have caused immense damage to the UK's asylum system and violated our obligations under international refugee law. The next government should restore the UK's commitment to the Refugee Convention, champion the rights of refugees and the shared international duty to provide for them, and fundamentally reset the asylum system to ensure fair and efficient decisions are made in a safe, accessible and welcoming manner.

That system would be properly supported by access to competent legal representation and by respecting the dignity of all people seeking asylum and providing them with permission to work. The system would positively promote the confidence of all people seeking asylum and their integration while passing through a consistent decision-making process, recognising the status of a refugee as soon as possible and, once recognised, ensuring every refugee is quickly provided the security of settlement in the UK. The system would encourage contact with and confidence in it and ensure resources were efficiently used to speedily assist people who will be staying (because they are entitled to asylum or, in some cases, for other reasons) while encouraging and assisting

▶ the safe return to countries of origin of people who are properly found to be without entitlement or other good grounds for staying.

To these ends, the next UK government should repeal the Illegal Migration Act 2023; abandon the current UK-Rwanda deal (and the Act that supports this) and the inadmissibility legislation and rules that underpin it and other policies; and repeal or replace large parts of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 to ensure the UK both respects international law and manages its share of asylum responsibility properly and effectively.

The UK should open and maintain safe routes, particularly for people seeking asylum who have family and other connections to this country. It should ensure these routes provide equal access for women and girls, and LGBTI+ people, by responding to their specific intersectional needs. In doing so, it should recognise the special importance of refugee family reunion rights to securing families and protecting women and girls.

Generally, the asylum system recognises the risks and harms endured by groups identifiable by particular protected characteristics, which might overlap to compound risk. For example, this requires recognition that many women and girls are survivors of gender-based violence; and, in the context of Afghanistan (to which we give specific consideration in the 'Rights, safety and choice for all women and girls' section, emphasising the need for policy coherence) that all women and girls are *prima facie* at risk of persecution on the grounds of their gender.

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- **Fully review the human impact of the immigration system, including to recognise the importance of family life and the harmful, unequal impacts of immigration processes, rules and fees.**

The immigration system results in serious human rights violations and enables exploitation in various ways. This is not good for people who migrate to the UK nor for the communities of which they are part. The next UK government should thoroughly review the immigration system to ensure it properly supports people according to their right or eligibility to enter or stay in the UK; protects families – especially where there are children – including migrant families and mixed British-migrant families; and, where at all possible, avoids making people vulnerable to criminal exploitation by their alienation, impoverishment, forced dependency on third parties, or fear of the immigration authorities or other services and bodies who report to those authorities.

A review should identify and remedy aspects of the system that exacerbate unreasonable costs and uncertainty for people who migrate to the UK, including

the excessive fees and rules that may change at any time during their stay in the country. It should give particular attention to ensuring that people on recognised routes to settlement (permanent stay) are not put at risk either by the inconsistency of the system or other unforeseen or unforeseeable changes in circumstances (such as injury, illness and so on); and ensuring proper respect for people whose lives are settled in the UK, and their families, by reform of deportation powers and practices.

The review should pave the way for a reset of policy priorities so that immigration legislation ceases to be given priority over and above other policy aims, such as securing public health, avoiding homelessness, effective policing and tackling domestic violence. It should also engage widely with all communities, including people and families directly affected by immigration rules and controls, to promote better understanding of migration.

Finally, the review should seek to redress the significant imbalance in the immigration system that reserves disproportionate constraint and severity for people who are more generally disadvantaged due to issues such as their relative poverty, race and social status.



## ▶ End over-policing of racialised communities

The next UK government should **ensure we all live in safer communities**. It should:

- **Enhance guidance and training on policing tools such as tasers and artificial intelligence to end the disproportionate use of force against Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.**

The next UK government should ensure that official police guidance for use of Tasers is significantly strengthened to ensure they are only used in response to life-threatening situations or those presenting an imminent threat of very serious injury. This would bring the UK in line with the requirements of the UN Basic Principles for Use of Force and Firearms. There should be a clear presumption against the use of Tasers against under-18s unless in exceptional circumstances.

Concrete action must be also taken to address significant levels of racism evidenced in Taser use, especially against Black men. All Taser use should be subject to mandatory post-incident review with a specific focus on ascertaining whether issues of race may have played a factor in the deployment of the weapon. The Independent Office for Police Conduct should be formally tasked with oversight of individual forces' professional standard procedures in areas of disproportionality and to report its findings on an annual basis.

The government should also prevent the introduction and use by police forces of any predictive or algorithmic-based data tools until it has been demonstrated that such technologies do not disproportionately impact racialised groups, in line with the UK's international human rights obligations.

- **End strip searches of children and ensure that allegations from children who are strip-searched are promptly, independently and thoroughly investigated, with opportunities for redress provided.**

The UK government must ensure children's allegations are promptly, impartially, independently and thoroughly investigated and that they have access to an effective remedy and adequate reparations. Where evidence indicates specific racialised and gendered impacts, this must be considered in the investigation and in any reparations provided. All those responsible for any misconduct must be held accountable through disciplinary or criminal proceedings, as appropriate.

The next UK government should urgently reverse the policy of basing police officers in schools and assist schools in their duty to provide an enabling and supportive environment to facilitate the realisation of children's rights.

- **Reverse the policy of allowing the presence of police officers in schools and rolling out effective safety campaigns in their place.**

Police officers are supposedly present in schools because of incidents of youth violence or drug-related harms in and around schools. Punitive responses to drugs or incidents of youth violence are resulting in compounding harm and have demonstrably failed to address drug-related and associated problems. As shown by a wide array of studies and guidance from the World Health Organisation (WHO), prevention campaigns that provide accurate information and education through non-stigmatising language and attitudes are far more effective in addressing drug-related harms than simply scaring children with the fear of punishment.

It is therefore essential for schools and governments to develop prevention campaigns that include a range of different interventions and policies based on age, level of risk and the environment in which the campaign will be implemented. WHO recommended best practice is to include efforts specifically tailored for children and adolescents, both in educational settings and environments outside school, aimed at empowering them to make informed decisions about their own conduct and provide them with information about where to find help if required.

As of January 2023, there were almost a thousand police officers in schools across the UK, half of whom were based in London. Schools with a higher number of students on free school meals and Black, Asian and minority ethnic students are targeted as a priority. Research has found the presence of police officers in schools to be ineffective<sup>3</sup>, with negative<sup>4</sup> impacts on all students, especially racialised students. Research<sup>5</sup> in Greater Manchester found that people wanted to see more positive investment in schools, more teachers and pastoral support, not more police. Schools have a duty to provide an enabling and supportive environment that facilitates the realisation of student's rights – this conflicts with the presence of police officers in schools.

Amnesty International UK does not agree that the presence of police officers in schools keeps children and communities safe.

3 [sianberry.london/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Sian\\_Berry\\_Nov2016\\_safer\\_schools\\_officers.pdf](https://sianberry.london/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Sian_Berry_Nov2016_safer_schools_officers.pdf)

4 [nopoliceinschools.co.uk/resources/Decriminalise\\_the\\_Classroom\\_-\\_A\\_Community\\_Response\\_to\\_Police\\_in\\_Greater\\_Manchester's\\_Schools.pdf](https://nopoliceinschools.co.uk/resources/Decriminalise_the_Classroom_-_A_Community_Response_to_Police_in_Greater_Manchester's_Schools.pdf)

5 [nopoliceinschools.co.uk/resources/Decriminalise\\_the\\_Classroom\\_-\\_A\\_Community\\_Response\\_to\\_Police\\_in\\_Greater\\_Manchester's\\_Schools.pdf](https://nopoliceinschools.co.uk/resources/Decriminalise_the_Classroom_-_A_Community_Response_to_Police_in_Greater_Manchester's_Schools.pdf)

### ▶ • **Scrap the Prevent strategy to comply with the UK's international legal obligations.**

The UK's Prevent strategy violates some of our most fundamental rights. Efforts by institutions and individuals to comply with Prevent are leading to violations of people's rights to freedom of expression; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of peaceful assembly; and, critically, the right to equality and non-discrimination.

A person referred to Prevent – and their relatives – can experience life-changing impacts: a loss of trust in state institutions; stress, anxiety and other mental health consequences; unmanageable financial costs associated with challenging referrals; and worries over their privacy and data protection. Poor transparency surrounding Prevent and barriers to redress compound these effects.

The next UK government should revoke the Prevent strategy, ensure people referred to Prevent have access to an independent complaints mechanism, and address broader long-term determinants of violence and harm. It should also withdraw the definition of extremism that has been introduced.

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### • **Root out institutional misogyny and racism in police forces, ensuring any reports of abuse are promptly, impartially and thoroughly investigated, with complainants having access to effective remedy.**

The stream of news about the actions of individual officers and police forces and the ongoing Spycops Inquiry have brought to light the insidious nature of institutional misogyny and racism in police forces. Figures from the National Police Chiefs' Council<sup>6</sup> have shown that more than 1,500 police officers were accused of violence against women in the six months between October 2021 and April 2022. The fact that less than 1 per cent of those officers have been sacked further highlights enormous shortcomings and underscores the need for a comprehensive and ongoing vetting service, which should be installed for new recruits and retrospectively applied to serving police officers.

The next UK government must prioritise institutional cultural change around racism and misogyny, including reform of policing bodies that continue to deny the existence of these institutional failings. The current framework of accountability for police conduct is not fit for purpose. For example, the investigation process led through the Independent Office for Police Conduct is wholly inadequate and requires radical overhaul.

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<sup>6</sup> [news.npcc.police.uk/releases/first-benchmark-of-police-performance-on-tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-published](https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/first-benchmark-of-police-performance-on-tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-published)

The next UK government should install a truly independent regulator that provides timely access to remedy for complainants, as well as ensuring that police oversight bodies have mandatory – not advisory – powers in relation to enforcing policing standards.

### ▶ Stronger rights protections across the UK

The next UK government should **strengthen rights protections in all parts of the UK**. It should:

- **Repeal the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act and legislate for the Stormont House Agreement in a manner that is fully compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights.**

Amnesty International welcomes commitments from opposition parties to repeal<sup>7</sup> the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act, which constitutes an egregious attack on human rights and is subject to an ongoing legal challenge. It breaches the Good Friday Agreement, sacrifices victims' rights in order to protect perpetrators, undermines the rule of law, is an unacceptable interference in the justice system, and sets a dangerous precedent internationally, including by signalling to other states that they too can put perpetrators of serious human rights violations, such as murder and torture, above the law and beyond accountability.

The Stormont House Agreement (SHA), with some adjustments, offered a way forward to successfully discharge the UK's human rights obligations. The next UK government should swiftly legislate for the SHA in a manner fully compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights to ensure victims' rights to truth, justice and reparations are realised.

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- **Support the further protection of rights in law across the UK, including the incorporation of economic, social and cultural rights in Wales and Scotland and the passage at Westminster of the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.**

Human rights are the cornerstones of the devolved settlements across the UK. The governments of Scotland and Wales have set out plans to better protect the rights of people in the devolved nations, including by incorporating international human rights standards into devolved law. The next government in Westminster should work with the devolved administrations to ensure the highest human rights standards for everyone across the UK.

Twenty-six years on, a bill of rights for Northern Ireland remains an undelivered commitment from the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement. There is overwhelming public support for one in the region: polling commissioned by

the Northern Ireland Assembly revealed more than 80 per cent support for the bill and for it to include new protections for economic, social and cultural rights. There is also widespread political support, but the UK government has so far blocked progress by insisting on complete consensus across all parties before it will legislate. If such a veto had been allowed to apply to the Good Friday Agreement or on matters such as the reform of policing, they would never have happened. It is time for the UK government to deliver the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights.

The Scottish government has well-advanced plans to introduce a Human Rights Bill which will incorporate ICESCR, CERD, CEDAW and CRPD as far as possible within devolved competence. This comes after the passage of the heavily amended UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act by the Scottish parliament following a UK government Supreme Court referral. The next UK government must work constructively with ministers in all devolved administrations at all stages from the beginning of the legislative process to engage in discussions around competence, and facilitate a maximalist approach to incorporation at a devolved level.

<sup>7</sup> [standard.co.uk/news/uk/keir-starmer-labour-university-chris-heatonharris-government-b1052861.html](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/keir-starmer-labour-university-chris-heatonharris-government-b1052861.html)

### ▶ Global leadership and revitalised diplomacy for human rights

The next UK government should **champion human rights around the world**. It should:

- **Adopt a principled foreign policy that acknowledges and responds to human rights violations in a consistent manner, wherever they take place.**

For decades, major powers, including the UK, have flouted international law with impunity and shielded their allies from accountability. The result is conflicts and crises rife with human rights violations in every corner of the world and unprecedented threats to the international law-based system, multilateralism and open societies. States interested in promoting multilateralism, internationalism and open, just and human rights-respecting societies must work strategically to oppose the global trend towards authoritarianism. Central to this must be consistent and outspoken support for international law and human rights.

As long as international law is defied without meaningful consequences, ordinary people will continue to suffer, especially the most marginalised. Impunity breeds more violations and encourages others to disregard their human rights obligations. The next UK government has a fresh opportunity to go beyond existing work and ensure the UK is truly a beacon for protecting and promoting human rights by developing a progressive foreign policy with human rights at its heart. Such a policy would be based upon the following principles:

1. People's human rights are made central to international policy and practice
2. Policy coherence for credibility on women's human rights
3. Genuine partnerships with human rights defenders
4. Modelling best practice domestically
5. Responsible business practices
6. Strengthening UN and other multilateral mechanisms for human rights
7. Sharing responsibility

- **Consistently support international justice and accountability mechanisms for crimes under international law.**

The next UK government should ensure that responses to conflicts and crises consistently place a victim- and survivor-centered approach to international justice at the heart of any support offered by the UK. This would be done by increasing financial and diplomatic support to the International Criminal Court for all situations

before it and through increasing support for domestic investigations (i) into all international crimes committed, regardless of who the victims and perpetrators are, and (ii) to guarantee that the rights of victims and survivors of war crimes and crimes against humanity who seek refuge in the UK are fully realised.

It is crucial for the maintenance and development of the international law-based system and the protection of civilians worldwide that the next UK government ensures commitments to support international justice mechanisms are applied consistently.

The next UK government should make it clear that no one is above international law, not leaders of armed groups nor government officials – whether elected or not. For example, this would mean the UK is outspoken in saying that those who are suspected of responsibility for crimes under international law in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories should face trial and accountability, no matter how powerful or how high-ranking they are.

The next UK government should publicly respect the legitimacy of the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice. If the International Criminal Court judges approve any arrest warrants in the Israel/Palestine case, then the UK must ensure the enforcement of these warrants. This will give a major boost to international justice efforts globally as well as the protection of civilians everywhere.

The UK must change its approach to the human rights crisis in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It must realise that justice and accountability processes are crucial to ending this decades-long crisis.

- **Ban the importation of products arising from activities that are a grave breach of international law.**

The next UK government should ban the importation of products arising from activities that are a grave breach of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, such as the use of forced labour in Xinjiang and the construction of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Allowing the importation of such products facilitates and legitimises the unlawful actions from which they arise. Merely excluding such goods from trade preferences does not go nearly far enough.

Banning the importation of such products, in line with international law, is the right thing to do. It is also the sensible thing to do for any UK government committed to upholding the rule of law, promoting the international law-based system and establishing the country as a leading international force against impunity.

- **Prioritise the promotion of civil society space worldwide, including freedom of expression, association and assembly and support for human rights defenders and journalists.**

It is no coincidence that unprecedented attacks on civic space and human rights defenders (HRDs) are taking place against a backdrop of rising authoritarianism and growing attacks on the international law-based system. HRDs are on the frontline: attacks against them foretell increasingly repressive and regressive policies and practices. They are also the most important partners for exposing and opposing those policies and practices.

Civil society space is being restricted and HRDs oppressed in every region of the world. New laws imposing onerous registration requirements, labelling legitimate organisations as ‘foreign agents’ or ‘terrorists’ and restricting access to funding (among other things) have become commonplace. At the same time, HRDs face a surge in attacks and repression, with policies restricting freedom of expression and assembly being implemented at an alarming rate around the world.

Meaningfully partnering with HRDs overseas and defending civic space would be the most natural and effective way to protect freedom of expression worldwide and further a range of UK foreign policy priorities. The next UK government should prioritise well-funded, strategic approaches to promoting freedom of expression and defending civic space, including protection for human rights defenders.

- **Ensure UK exports of arms and security equipment are responsible, with a clear focus on strengthening international treaties and regulations.**

The UK remains a global leader in the supply and manufacture of a wide variety of military, security and policing equipment and related technologies. Billions of pounds of ongoing arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the use of these weapons in the conflict in Yemen for serious breaches of international law demonstrate that the current UK government’s arms export licensing system is not fit for purpose. They also show that the system is incompatible with our international legal obligations to prevent the sale of weapons when it is likely they will be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international law.

The next UK government should strengthen the national export control system by introducing a presumption against the sale of equipment to countries flagged in its own human rights reporting as being of concern. It should also introduce new controls on the trade, promotion and marketing of spyware and other communications

monitoring equipment, as well as expand licensing controls to cover the provision of overseas military and police training.

As a key global player in this sector and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the UK government should take the lead in strengthening existing legal frameworks, including the implementation and enforcement of the Arms Trade Treaty, as well as championing the development of new international controls on lethal autonomous weapons systems and related technology, less-lethal policing equipment and tools of torture.

- **Work to abolish the death penalty around the world.**

The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and needs to be opposed in all cases without exception. A total of 1,153 executions took place in 2023, marking an increase of more than 30 per cent from 2022, largely due to a huge spike in recorded executions in Iran. This does not include the thousands of executions believed to have been carried out in China, where death penalty data remains a state secret. Most of the other executions took place in Saudi Arabia, Somalia and the USA. Despite the actions of a few states, progress towards ending the death penalty continues.

Today, 112 countries are fully abolitionist and 144 in total have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. This shows the ever-increasing trend towards rejecting the death penalty as a lawful punishment under international human rights law. The death penalty will come under scrutiny at the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly, offering an opportunity for the UK to again rally behind the UN’s call to end the use of the death penalty.

The next UK government should **put human rights at the heart of all climate action** decision-making to ensure a rapid, equitable and just transition to zero-carbon economies that reduce inequalities between and within countries. It should:

- **Ensure that the countries most responsible for emissions contribute the most to climate finance.**

Climate change is intimately linked with human rights because of its effect not only on the environment but on our own well-being – and, ultimately, our survival. Governments in countries that have contributed the most to climate change must act first and make the biggest reductions. The next UK government has the opportunity to scale up needs-based climate finance, particularly

▶ for adaptation and loss and damage. As an important participant in the global discussions regarding climate change finance, the UK should promote:

- The inclusion of sub-goals on mitigation (including to stop the development of new fossil fuel infrastructures), adaptation, and loss and damage in the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance.
- Adequate capitalisation based on the polluter pays principle for the Loss and Damage Fund to enable affected people in lower-income countries to effectively access resources.
- Provision of adequate finance for all aspects of a just transition.
- Work to scale up climate finance wherever it is needed, in the form of grants, not loans.
- Equitable transformation of global systems of development finance, taxation, and public and private investment.
- Debt restructuring for countries that need it.

• **Commit to a full, fast, fair and funded fossil fuel phase-out across all sectors. The next UK government should commit to phasing out fossil fuel without relying on risky and unproven technologies or offsets that do not lead to genuine reductions in emissions.**

The UK government, in common with others, is legally obliged to rapidly reduce and phase out fossil-fuel emissions. Failure to do so would be a violation of some of our most fundamental human rights including the rights to health, food, housing and to life. The next UK government should commit to phasing out fossil fuels without relying on risky and unproven technologies, or offsets that do not lead to genuine reductions in emissions.

The next UK government should **be a world leader on corporate accountability**. It should:

• **Commit to regulate to ensure companies prevent human rights violations across their value chains.**

The next UK government should put in place due diligence regulation to require companies to prevent human rights violations across their global value chains, modelled on the UK Bribery Act S.7, as already recommended by parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights.

Such legislation would improve the impacts on human rights of UK businesses and the protections offered to human rights defenders and victims of corporate abuses. It would also ensure that the UK is at the forefront of setting standards for sustainable trade and investment worldwide. This would help level the playing field for British businesses due to the rapid advances being made

in other countries. More than 50 businesses<sup>8</sup> and trade associations, including the British Retail Consortium, the John Lewis Partnership, Tesco and Sainsbury's, and nine investors holding £1.4 trillion in assets have joined the call for mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence legislation.

The next UK government should urgently develop a **Path to Freedom strategy for all British nationals arbitrarily detained abroad**. It should:

• **Grant all those who are arbitrarily detained abroad a legal right to receive consular access and ensure there is a clear strategy in place to support them and secure their release.**

Safeguarding British nationals – including dual nationals – facing arbitrary detention abroad should be placed at the heart of foreign policy and practice and be made overarching government priority. Until now, we have seen an inconsistent approach to individual cases, which would suggest that the UK has lacked a clear strategy to support individuals. If a strategy already exists, then it needs implementing or updating to actually be effective.

Under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, states have a right to provide consular assistance to their detained nationals to ensure that their basic needs are met and fundamental rights respected. Amnesty International takes the position that states can demand access to their citizen as nothing in Article 36 of the Vienna Convention would suggest otherwise and no exceptions (such as dual nationality) should be made.

The UK has not only failed to secure its right under international law to provide consular support to its nationals, but has even tacitly agreed with countries such as Iran by asserting (contrary to the Vienna Convention) that the UK 'cannot help dual nationals when they are in the country of their own nationality'.

• **Offer regular cabinet-level meetings with family members to provide support and guidance.**

While working with the families of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, Anoosheh Ashoori, Morad Tahbaz and Alaa Abdel Fattah, it was only by exerting public pressure that we were able to secure any high-level meetings with the UK government. Families are often directed to the FCDO consular desk officer, which is the lowest level and often someone who does not have influence or knowledge to effectively advocate for release.

<sup>8</sup> [media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/UK\\_BUSINESS\\_STATEMENT\\_MHREDD\\_Sept22.pdf](https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/UK_BUSINESS_STATEMENT_MHREDD_Sept22.pdf)

- ▶ The next UK government should make access to regular cabinet-level meetings with family members standard practice for all families of British national arbitrarily detained abroad, providing them with support and updates.

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- **Secure the immediate and unconditional release of British nationals Mehran Raouf, Jimmy Lai and Alaa Abdel Fattah.**

All three individuals remain arbitrarily detained abroad, in Iran, Hong Kong and Egypt, with the UK government failing to secure their release. To date, Mehran has not even been publicly named by the UK government, while Alaa remains in Egypt with the UK government's public calls on his case much less frequent than they were during COP27 climate summit in Egypt in 2022.

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