

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Amnesty International urges the United Kingdom to preserve current human rights protections

Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on the United Kingdom

Amnesty International regrets the United Kingdom's rejection of every single one of the thirteen recommendations calling for the preservation of its current level of human rights protection in any changes to the Human Rights Act 1998 and during the process of leaving the European Union.¹

The Human Rights Act 1998 is the primary domestic tool for ensuring human rights compliance and access to remedies for individuals. It is currently complemented by extensive protections derived from EU law. Proposals to replace the Act risk leading to a weakening of standards and decoupling of the national human rights system from international standards.

Amnesty International is also concerned that Brexit may – unless the right steps are taken - result in the loss of complementary protections. The organization recommends that the UK commit to retaining the Human Rights Act 1998, remaining a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights and ensuring there is no roll-back of rights and equality standards as a result of leaving the EU.

The law governing abortion in Northern Ireland differs from that in the rest of the United Kingdom. It is among the most restrictive in Europe, both in law and in practice. Access to abortion is limited to exceptional cases where the life or health of the woman is at risk of serious and adverse effects which are either long term or permanent. That is incompatible with the UK's human rights obligations.

While welcoming the UK government's decision to cover payments for abortion services in England for women usually resident in Northern Ireland, Amnesty International regrets the UK's rejection of the three recommendations which would have made it unnecessary for women to take that step².

The UK government claims that responsibility for reform of the law lies with the Northern Irish Executive. Amnesty International does not accept that women should be expected to suffer while that political deadlock is resolved.

Amnesty International recommends that the UK ensure that the law governing access to abortion in Northern Ireland fully complies with international human rights law, by decriminalising abortion and ensuring access in cases of severe and fatal foetal abnormalities and where pregnancy results from rape or incest.

Indefinite immigration detention continues to be widely used in the UK, with no guarantee of proper regular judicial oversight, including for individuals from particularly vulnerable groups.

¹ such as 134.78 France and above

² 134.170 (Iceland), 134.172 (Sweden) and 134.173 (Canada)

It is regrettable that the UK insists it does not detain people indefinitely, and relies on inadequate government reviews as a safeguard against illegality. Further, it is deeply troubling that the UK has rejected those recommendations that propose the introduction of a statutory time limit for detention of migrants and asylum seekers and would ensure that vulnerable individuals are not detained at all.³

Amnesty International recommends that the UK introduce a statutory, short time limit on immigration detention designed to constrain its use, and ensure such detention is only used exceptionally where there is no possible alternative, and not in the case of vulnerable individuals and groups.

Background

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of the United Kingdom on 21 September 2017 during its 36th session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered the above oral statement. Amnesty International also contributed to the information basis of the review through its submission on country: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur45/5488/2017/en/>

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³ 134.215 (Brazil), 134.217-219 (Germany, Mexico, Bangladesh)