

A HUMAN RIGHTS MANIFESTO:

Amnesty International's proposals for the next UK government



HOME AFFAIRS

The UK is set to head to the polls for the first general election since 2019 and much has happened since then. At home, we have seen a huge rollback in human rights protections. From the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act to the Illegal Migration Act, the Judicial Review and Courts Act to 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. In 2022, we saw new, renewed and protracted conflicts that led to appalling tragedies, including Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which triggered an extensive human rights, humanitarian and displacement crisis. States around the world are also continuing to repress universal freedoms, to the extent that in 2022 US NGO Freedom House reported that only 20 per cent of people now live in so-called 'free countries', down from 46 per cent in 2005.

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. **This shortened version only covers home affairs.**

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 by a number of UK political parties – 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 repealing any legislation or specific provisions that undermine universality and/or contravene or disapply the Human Rights Act. For example, Clause 1(5) of the Illegal



Migration Act and sections 42-45 of the Victims and Prisoners Bill (if passed).

• **Repeal the poorly drafted Public Order Act and sections of the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act to safeguard freedom of expression and the right to protest.**

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. By its very nature protest 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 sufficient powers to manage protest safely within the law and prevent violence or other criminal activity from taking place. Measures such as new noise and annoyance thresholds, significant expansion of stop-and-search powers related to protests, protest-banning orders and the criminalisation of 'locking on' interfere with the right to freedom of expression in a disproportionate, unnecessary and ultimately unlawful way.

Anti-protest legislation introduced in 2022 and 2023 contain definitions that 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 misconduct¹. 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 repealed at the earliest opportunity. Doing so would cement the next UK government's commitment to freedom of expression and help rebuild public trust in the police.

1 [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)

• **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.**

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) dramatically reduced access to legal aid for tens of thousands of people in civil cases, stripping 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.

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

The British Nationality Act 1981 introduced British citizenship into UK nationality law. As a result, children born in the UK would only acquire British citizenship automatically at birth if one of their parents was either a British citizen or settled in the UK, for example, through indefinite leave to remain. Home Office practice, policy and legislation since the passing of that Act have substantially undermined its clear purpose in creating British citizenship. This has caused significant inequality between British people, with disproportionate adverse impacts on members of racial and religious minority groups.

The next UK government should repair the damage that has been done. For example, it should remove administrative barriers and threats – including excessive fees and character requirements for registration of citizenship and excessive powers of citizenship deprivation – to the rights contained in the British Nationality Act 1981. This would restore the citizenship 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.

The next UK government should ensure that human rights education 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, committing significant development funding to respond to the conflict in Yemen while continuing to sell arms to Saudi Arabia and thereby facilitating the continuation of the conflict. 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 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.

- ▶ • **Prioritise the right to housing by building at least 90,000 new social homes a year and review conditions that currently deny thousands of people access to social housing.**

For too long, homelessness across the UK has been explained away as the failure of an individual to cope with the stresses and strains of life. However, the lack of social housing, the rising cost of housing in general, a fall in real incomes, and benefit cuts make accessing adequate and affordable housing for those living in or on the brink of poverty a near-impossible task.

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 a year.

The next UK government should also abolish the criteria of ‘priority need’ and ‘intentionality’ for determining entitlement to housing; 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. Finally, it should take steps, including through amendments to immigration legislation, to ensure that every person regardless of immigration status is able to avoid homelessness.

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, Wales and Scotland.**
- **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. But the Northern Ireland health minister failed to put in place commissioned abortion services in line with the new framework to ensure choice was enabled and provision accessible to all who need it. In the latter half of 2022, the secretary of state for Northern Ireland directed the Department of Health to commission services and allocated ring-fenced funds to ensure services could be set up. The next UK government should ensure that provision continues to meet its legal obligations and is sustainable, accessible and respects and protects choice.

- ▶ **Put women's human rights at the centre of international relations and working 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, Poland, Hungary, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the USA and other countries. The UK has strategic relationships with many of these states but is failing 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 include strong political and practical support to international justice and accountability mechanisms, for example, supporting an International Criminal Court investigation 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 own 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.

- **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 removing the 'no recourse to public funds' rule for survivors 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 moving to a system of self-ID.**
- **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 bring it in line with international human rights standards. A reformed Act should introduce a system of self-ID – 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 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. In May 2023, it slid to 17th place in the 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 and the ban on ‘conversion therapy’.

- **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’.**

- **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; abandon the current UK-Rwanda deal 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 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.

- **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).

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.

Better relationships between communities and the police

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

- **Support the police to end the disproportionate use of force against Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, including through enhanced guidance and training on policing tools such as Tasers and the increased use of artificial intelligence.**

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 against minoritised people 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.

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- **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. In the Child Q case, the evidence indicates specific gendered impacts and harm done to the child, which are deeply troubling and must be considered in the investigation and in any reparations provided. All those responsible must be held

accountable through disciplinary or criminal proceedings, as appropriate.

Black children, especially Black girls, have long been victims of ‘adultification’, where even at an early age and during childhood they are subject to questioning and policing as if they were adults. This process leads to disproportionate policing, the persistence of inequalities and sometimes tragic consequences and violations of their human rights. This was also found in Amnesty International UK’s research into the Gangs Matrix, where children as young as 12 had their data held on a database that relies on the most banal factors such as YouTube searches and song choices. Research from Georgetown University found² that adults view Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers, especially in the 5-14 age range.

In order to avoid these human rights violations from occurring again, the next UK government should urgently reverse the policy of allowing the presence of 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.

2 law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/08/girlhood-interrupted.pdf

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 ineffective³, with negative⁴ impacts on all students, especially racialised students. Research⁵ 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.

- **Ensure meaningful consultation with communities disproportionately impacted by over-policing, including through Prevent, and create opportunities for public and civil society engagement.**

The last decade of reporting on Prevent has led to a further entrenching of positions in an already polarising debate. The appointment of individuals who have previously demonstrated bias in this policy area to conduct government reviews, along with a failure to ensure healthy dialogue with civil society, has further disillusioned many people, who believe that the government is not taking seriously concerns about Prevent’s discriminatory outcomes, ineffectiveness and erosion of civil liberties.

The next UK government should disentangle Prevent from safeguarding by repealing the statutory duty for specified authorities, which has been criticised by frontline workers and trade unions. As a long-term objective, it should seek to better understand the root causes of why individuals go on to commit acts of harm, as outlined in the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights. Her report states the shift to pre-crime programmes in preventing and countering violent extremism, such as Prevent, renders whole communities and individuals within them as ‘suspect’ and that securitising care professions breaks the fragile trust between them and patients. Furthermore, ensuring discussion around counter-terrorism and human rights in the public sphere does not fall to sensationalism is a crucial step in defusing the polarising atmosphere.

3 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

5 nopoliceinschools.co.uk/resources/Decriminalise_the_Classroom_-_A_Community_Response_to_Police_in_Greater_Manchester's_Schools.pdf

- ▶ **Work to regain the trust of women and Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities by rooting 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' Council⁶ 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. 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.

⁶ news.npcc.police.uk/releases/first-benchmark-of-police-performance-on-tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-published

Stronger rights protections across the UK

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

- **Build on its work to bring peace and stability in Northern Ireland by repealing the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act and reverting to the Stormont House Agreement.**

Amnesty International welcomes commitments from opposition parties to repeal⁷ the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act – an egregious attack on human rights – should it become law. 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 would set 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/ independent human rights-compliant mechanisms to ensure victims' rights to truth, justice and accountability are realised.

- **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 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-five years on, a bill of rights for Northern Ireland remains an undelivered commitment from the Good Friday Agreement. There is overwhelming public support for one in the region: polling commissioned by the Northern Ireland Assembly revealed more than 80

⁷ standard.co.uk/news/uk/keir-starmer-labour-university-chris-heatonharris-government-b1052861.html

- ▶ 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.

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