



Fourth Report
from the
Foreign Affairs Committee

Session 2004–05

Annual Report on Human Rights 2004

Response of the Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

*Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
by Command of Her Majesty
May 2005*

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FOURTH REPORT FROM THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SESSION 2004-5

ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS 2004

RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

1. The Government welcome the scrutiny by the Committee of its work to promote human rights overseas and value the positive dialogue that continues between the Committee and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office over the content and format of the Annual Report on Human Rights.
2. We expect to publish the next Annual Report on Human Rights in July 2005 – earlier than usual due to the Government’s commitments during the UK Presidency of the European Union. We look forward to discussing this report with the Committee.
3. This Command Paper sets out the Government’s response to the Committee’s 25 March 2005 Report into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Annual Report on Human Rights 2004. The Committee’s recommendations are set out in bold. Unless otherwise indicated, references are to paragraphs in the Foreign Affairs Committee Report (HC 109).

We concur with our witnesses in praising the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the substantial contribution made by the Human Rights Annual Report 2004 to the transparency and visibility of the Government’s work in this important area. (Paragraph 4)

4. The Government thank the Committee for its positive assessment of the Annual Report on Human Rights 2004. We will continue to look for ways to improve the report in order to fulfil their objective of informing Parliament and the public of their efforts to promote human rights around the world. We welcome the constructive comments of the Committee in this regard.

We conclude that 2005 presents a unique opportunity for the UK to shape international priorities, and to promote human rights within the international system. We recommend that the Government set out, in its response to this Report, the specific human rights goals it will seek to achieve during its presidencies of the G8 and EU. (Paragraph 10)

5. The Government are seeking to use their G8 Presidency to agree a package of G8 action to support African development. This includes several actions to promote human rights, including: common standards for controls on light weapons; encouraging African countries to implement the African Charter on Human and People's Rights; support for a UN Peacebuilding Commission; and

work with the private sector, the OECD and the UN Global Compact to maximise the contribution from business to peace and stability through responsible business practice. The Government also want the G8 Summit to highlight the leading role African countries have in improving governance within their own countries, and in supporting each other in doing this.

6. Through the G8 Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) initiative, the Government encourage the international community directly to address sensitive issues of democracy, good governance and human rights. Together with Italy, Turkey, Yemen and the US the Government are supporting the Democracy Assistance Dialogue. This will bring together civil society, political institutions and democracy assistance providers to develop recommendations for governments on issues including political process, elections and women's political participation. We also support the Civil Society Dialogue from which we intend that platforms for action are developed on themes of transparency and corruption, rule of law, human rights and women's employment.
7. The Government are actively engaged with the European Commission and EU partners in taking forward the European Council decision to extend the remit of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in order to create a Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). In October 2004, the Commission sought the views of Member State governments and civil society on the establishment of this Agency. The Government published their response in January 2005. A copy was sent to both parliamentary European Scrutiny Committees, which supported the government position that the focus of the Agency should be upon compliance by the institutions of the European Union with human rights, and that the Agency's primary purpose should be data collection and analysis. We have maintained regular contact with key EU partners since then, and expect the Commission to bring forward a legislative proposal in mid-2005. The Commission would like to see the FRA established by January 2007.
8. The December 2004 European Council "welcomed the decision to appoint a Personal Representative of the Secretary General/High Representative on Human Rights in the area of Common and Foreign Security Policy as a contribution to the coherence and continuity of the EU Human Rights policy, with due regard to the responsibilities of the Commission". Javier Solana appointed Michael Matthiessen to this post in January 2005. Matthiessen has now identified a number of areas where he could usefully contribute to the coherence and consistency of EU policy. The Government agree with him that these include implementation of the EU's Human Rights Guidelines; the EU's human rights activity within the UN; the continuity of EU human rights dialogues with third countries; relations with the European Parliament; the promotion of human rights in the EU's third country contacts; contacts with NGOs, and wider "mainstreaming" of human rights across CFSP activity. We intend to work closely with him on these issues during the UK Presidency of the EU. We note the Committee's suggestion that Mr Matthiessen should be asked to review the EU's human rights work, as one of his first tasks. The

Government's perception is that over recent years much of the focus of the Human Rights Working Group has been on the development of new human rights tools, and on internal review. We are keen that the Working Group, and Matthiessen, should focus most of their energy, in the immediate future, on concrete use of these human rights tools and implementation of existing review conclusions.

9. The Government agree that the proposed European External Action Service (EEAS) should take full account of human rights in its work. The Government welcome the opportunity offered by the EEAS to bring greater coherence to the EU's external policies across the board, including human rights, as well as other issues such as conflict prevention. This would be made possible by bringing together the relevant departments in the institutions, together with Member States, and by providing effective support to the EU Foreign Minister. The need for an effective Service, which genuinely adds coherence and enhances the EU's policies in key areas such as human rights, is a central message in the UK's discussions with other Member States.
10. The Government's primary objective on human rights during their EU presidency is effective and results-focused delivery of the EU's current wide range of human rights activity (the "inherited agenda"). We also aim to use our presidency to further embed "mainstreaming" of human rights in wider EU work. We believe that both these goals are consistent with the FAC recommendation to use our Presidency to improve the quality of the EU's work on human rights, without any diminution of accountability to Parliament.

We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government provide a description of which individual projects have migrated from the old Human Rights Project Fund to today's Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance programme or to other programmes within the Global Opportunities Fund. This explanation should include a definition of "human rights project" and an elaboration of what proportion of the new programmes is allocated to human rights work and the extent of the geographical coverage of these projects, as compared to the activity under the old fund. (Paragraph 19)

11. In order to answer the Committee's question about the migration of projects from the Human Rights Project Fund to the Global Opportunities Fund, it is necessary to explain how the two relate.
12. The Global Opportunities Fund was originally established with five programmes. Of these five, three included human rights, democracy and governance as one of their key objectives. These programmes, entitled Engaging with the Islamic World, Re-uniting Europe and Strengthening Relations With Emerging Markets, all had a limited geographical scope and focused their human rights-related projects on certain issues of specific concern in their focus regions (e.g. women's rights in the Middle East). In the first year

of the Global Opportunities Fund (Financial Year 2003/04) the Human Rights Project Fund continued to exist alongside the Global Opportunities Fund.

13. For the second year of the Global Opportunities Fund (2004/05) the Government decided to replace the Human Rights Project Fund with a sixth Global Opportunities Fund programme, entitled Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance. This programme was designed to complement the other Global Opportunities Fund programmes and ensure that the FCO was able to continue to support project work on key human rights priorities, which were not covered by other thematic or geographical programme budgets. Because of the growth of the budget of the Global Opportunities Fund in 2004/05, and the ongoing focus of three of the existing programmes on human rights, it was decided that the new Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance programme did not need to have as large a budget as the Human Rights Project Fund. Even with the smaller budget, the amount spent on human rights in 2004/05 grew considerably compared with 2003/04, as the table below illustrates. The figures shown refer only to expenditure on projects supporting human rights, democracy and governance.

	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06 (Projected)
HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT FUND*	£6.6M	£7.4M	£8.1M	£2.4M	£0.5M
GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES FUND					
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**	-	-	-	£3.5M	£3.5M
ENGAGING WITH THE ISLAMIC WORLD	-	-	£1.2M	£3.3M	£5.0M
RE-UNITING EUROPE	-	-	£1.3M	£2.6M	£3.0M
ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE ***	-	-	£0.7M	£1.4M	£2.0M
COUNTER-TERRORISM	-	-	£0.2M	£0.2M	£0.5M
TOTAL****	£6.6M	£7.4M	£11.4M	£13.3M	£14.5M

*Years 04/05 and 05/06 refer to ongoing commitments to multiyear projects agreed in 2002/03 and 2003/04.

**Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance Programme in 2004/05

***Strengthening Relationships with Emerging Markets Programme in 2004/05

****Does not include project money spent on Human Rights, Democratisation and Good Governance through the Directorate Programme Budgets, Global Conflict Prevention Pools or Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

14. The table also illustrates the way in which the Human Rights Project Fund (HRPF) has been wound down gradually, over three years. The allocations listed in the table for 2004/05 and 2005/06 are the commitments to longer term projects funded initially between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2004. Because of this gradual reduction and the increase in Global Opportunities Fund budgets available for human rights projects, there has been no need to move projects from the HRPF to the Global Opportunities Fund.

15. The Committee asked the Government to define the term, “human rights project”. The Government use the definition that a human rights project is one that furthers HMG’s human rights priorities and objectives in the country concerned. This means that projects will vary from one country to another and from one region to another.

16. The Committee also asked for a comparison of the geographical spread of the Human Rights Project Fund compared with the Global Opportunities Fund. The Human Rights Project Fund was open to all countries throughout the world and by the end of 2003/04 had funded projects in about 90 countries. In 2004/05 this global reach continued, as the Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance programme of the Global Opportunities Fund was also open to applications for funding from all countries. In 2005/06, with the introduction of the Sustainable Development programme, replacing the Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance programme, 73 countries are eligible for funding under any of the four Global Opportunities Fund projects that have promoting human rights as one of their primary objectives.

We conclude that the UN is going through a necessary process of scrutiny and reform, but affirm that the work of this vitally important institution should be fully recognised. We recommend that the Government continue to support the very important work carried out by the United Nations in the field of human rights. (Paragraph 23)

17. The Government, along with our EU partners, play a leading role in supporting the human rights work of the UN. We recognise that there are flaws in the system. Thus, reform of the United Nations' human rights machinery is one of our priorities for the September 2005 Summit. We want to see a strengthened

UN, with more effective human rights instruments and mainstreaming of human rights principles across the UN system.

We conclude that the recommendations of the High Level Panel are to be welcomed, and that they provide a basis for further debate on strengthening the international system for dealing with abuses of human rights. We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government set out its policy position on the implementation of the Panel's recommendations. (Paragraph 29)

18. The Government welcomed the work of the High Level Panel in December 2004, as well as the UN Secretary General's report 'In Larger Freedom', which was released in March 2005 and which responded to the Panel's recommendations. We are actively engaged in taking forward the reform agenda, and participated in General Assembly debates in April 2005 on 'In Larger Freedom' (UK statements are available at www.ukun.org). The Government will work hard for a successful outcome at the Summit in September 2005 for a package of reforms on development, human rights, security and UN administration, not only as committed supporters of the UN but also through our Presidencies of the G8 and EU.

We commend the Government's ongoing and uphill efforts to improve the work and credibility of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government set out specific objectives on which it will seek to make progress in 2005. (Paragraph 36)

19. The Government has participated fully in the debate on reform of the UN human rights machinery, following the publication of the Secretary General's report "In Larger Freedom". In particular, we agree with the concerns raised about the credibility of the Commission on Human Rights and the need for more effective mainstreaming of human rights throughout the UN system. The Government's objective is to agree with UN partners a set of measures which will make a real difference to the UN's ability to improve the human rights situation on the ground. Such measures might include:

- Enhanced links between the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other parts of the UN system (Security Council, Peacebuilding Commission);
- Increased regular budget funding for the Office of the High Commissioner;
- A standing Human Rights Council which would include a peer review and crisis response function;
- Reform of the Treaty Monitoring Bodies and enhancement of the work of the Special Mechanisms.

20. The Government are keen to see the UN human rights machinery function better and are working closely with partners to develop a package of measures which will both be effective and attract broad support.

We recommend that the Government continue to give its backing to the International Criminal Court, and that it support the referral of the crimes in Darfur to the ICC, in line with the recommendation of the International Commission of Inquiry. (Paragraph 42)

21. The Government played an active role in bringing about the establishment of the ICC and continue to be one of its strongest supporters. We believe in a strong International Criminal Court with global membership and jurisdiction to fight impunity for the most heinous crimes; crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. We are working with EU partners to urge more states to accede to the Rome Statute of the ICC so that the Court can enjoy the widest possible jurisdiction. We are engaged in dialogue with the Court, at official level, to consider ways of providing effective practical support. In November 2004 the UK became the second state to sign a witness relocation agreement with the ICC. We are negotiating further bilateral agreements with the court on sentence enforcement and information co-operation.
22. The Government made clear from the outset that our preference was for the situation in Darfur to be referred to the International Criminal Court as recommended by the International Commission of Inquiry. We are pleased that there proved to be sufficient support in the UN Security Council for the UK-sponsored resolution that achieved this referral.

We recommend that the Government continue to put pressure on its European partners to come to a speedy resolution of the respective remits of the putative EU Human Rights Agency and Personal Representative on Human Rights in the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and to ensure that the new External Action Service takes full account of the human rights dimension of its work. We further recommend that the Government press for the Personal Representative to conduct, as one of his first tasks, a review of the EU's human rights work, with a view to rationalising and improving the implementation of its policies in this area. We recommend that, during the UK Presidency of the EU, the Government make one of its priorities improvement of the quality of the EU's work on human rights, without there being any diminution of the accountability of the British Government to Parliament in this area. (Paragraph 47)

23. Please see paras 7-10 above.

We conclude that, despite Turkey's substantial and welcome progress towards adopting European norms of respect for human rights and freedoms, significant areas of concern remain. We recommend that the Government continue to press for satisfactory resolution of these problems by Turkey and, under the UK Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2005, ensure that

human rights is a key part of accession talks when these begin in October 2005. (Paragraph 54)

24. The Government welcome the conclusion of the Committee that we should continue to press Turkey to continue its substantial progress towards adopting European norms of respect for human rights and freedoms. Since the December European Council, at which it was decided that Turkey sufficiently fulfilled the Copenhagen political criteria and that accession negotiations should be opened on 3 October 2005, the UK and EU have repeatedly stressed at the highest levels the need for Turkey to maintain the momentum of reform. The outstanding legislation called for in the December Council Conclusions has now been passed, and those bills that remain to enter into force will do so on 1 June 2005. In the interim, further refinements are being made to the new Penal Code that should bring it closer still to EU models. The Turkish government continue to make progress implementing the reforms passed, and will need to continue its efforts in this area.
25. The Turkish Prime Minister has repeated his government's commitment to continued reform, not just for EU accession but in order that all Turkish citizens should enjoy full respect for their fundamental rights. The Government believe that Turkey's EU candidacy has been and, with the opening of accession negotiations, will continue to be, an effective catalyst for improvement in Turkey's human rights situation. We are confident that all remaining concerns will be addressed during the accession process, and will continue to monitor the situation in Turkey closely and raise concerns in the context of accession negotiations.
26. The December 2004 European Council Conclusions stressed the importance of the reform process being sustained and irreversible and the need for it to be fully and effectively implemented. They stated that the reform process "will continue to be closely monitored by the Commission, which is invited to continue to report regularly on it to the Council, addressing all points of concern identified in the Commission's 2004 report and recommendation". The Union will therefore continue to monitor attentively the progress made by Turkey in these areas and will raise outstanding issues in the various fora for political dialogue and in the bodies set up under the Association Agreement.

We conclude that the response by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the appalling consequences of the tsunami was generally comprehensive, well co-ordinated and indispensable to those British nationals and their families affected by the disaster, both in the UK and the affected areas. We commend the strenuous efforts of FCO staff who worked selflessly in the aftermath of the event to help the victims and their families. We also commend the departmental crisis management structures which were in place before the disaster happened, and which were used so effectively in the event. (Paragraph 61)

We conclude that the generally good response of the FCO provides little consolation to those people who did experience problems, in extremely difficult circumstances of great personal stress. We recommend that the FCO continue to improve its processes, in the light of further assessment of its response to the tsunami crisis, and that the Government inform Parliament of any developments. (Paragraph 62)

27. The Government welcome the Committee's commendation of the overall FCO response to the tsunami crisis and, in particular, its recognition of the tireless work done by individual members of staff in exceptionally difficult conditions.
28. The Government fully accept the Committee's recommendation to continue to improve our crisis response procedures and to inform Parliament of any developments. The Foreign Secretary said in his statement to the House on 22 March 2005 that regular oral statements would continue to be made to the House on the tsunami crisis, including the international relief effort, by whichever Minister is appropriate. We have now finished the internal review of our response to the tsunami crisis and will be making the conclusions available to Members of Parliament shortly. We expect the National Audit Office to present its report on the FCO's handling of the tsunami crisis to the Public Accounts Committee by the end of the year.

We conclude that any attempt by the Indonesian government to use the cover of the tsunami to perpetrate human rights abuses in the Aceh region would be iniquitous. We recommend that the Government make the strongest representations to the Indonesian government to ensure that this is not taking place. We further recommend that the Government do all it can to help both sides reach a peaceful settlement of that conflict. We recommend that the Government put further pressure on the Indonesian government to improve its protection of human rights in West Papua. (Paragraph 66)

29. We note the concerns by the FAC over the management of the aftermath of the tsunami crisis in Aceh, Indonesia. Since 26 December 2004, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Development have both visited Indonesia. Minister of State Douglas Alexander also visited Indonesia in March, for part of which he was in Aceh. We have therefore raised regularly with the Indonesian government our concerns about Aceh, and supported continuing access there. In the last four months, the Government of President Yudhoyono have restarted negotiations with the Free Aceh Movement, looking for a political solution to the long-term conflict in the region. These talks are ongoing. The British government with other members of the international community fully support these.
30. Despite the GAM announcing a ceasefire in the region on 29 December last year, there are still reports of the Indonesian Army (TNI) and GAM engaging each other. It is clear that both sides are committing human rights abuses. But we do not believe that the Indonesia government are using the tsunami as a cover. The TNI, for instance, were heavily involved in humanitarian assistance

at the worst period of the crisis. Without their presence, the impact of the disaster in the area would have been markedly worse. The government also allowed prompt access to the area by international NGOs and other observers and have maintained this, despite some newly introduced restrictions. We continue to impress on them the need for full access to the region.

31. We accept that the situation in Papua is also of concern, and have raised this both in the visit by Ministerial Special Envoy Michael Williams to Jakarta last December, and in the recent visit by Mr Alexander. We continue to be concerned about reports in the region of human rights abuses and attacks against Papuans by the TNI. The Embassy in Jakarta visited the region in May to assess the situation there. They met a wide range of contacts including human rights organisations. We will continue to raise any reports with the Indonesian government. President Yudhoyono had publicly committed himself to implementing Special Autonomy for Papua, and local elections are planned this summer.

We conclude that, now that the British nationals have been released from detention at Guantánamo Bay, the Government need no longer keep its diplomacy quiet in the interests of increasing leverage over individual cases. We recommend that the Government make strong public representations to the US administration about the lack of due process and oppressive conditions in Guantánamo Bay and other detention facilities controlled by the US in foreign countries. We further recommend that, during the UK Presidency of the European Union, the Government raise the situation at these facilities at the UN Commission for Human Rights. (Paragraph 79)

32. The US Government and international community are well aware of the Government's views on Guantanamo Bay, including on the question of due process and the detention conditions there. Notwithstanding the release of the British nationals detained at Guantanamo, we will continue to discuss questions relating to the detention of suspected terrorists with the US Government.
33. The US Government announced at the recent Commission on Human Rights that they are discussing possible visits to Guantanamo with the UN Special Rapporteurs on torture, on independence of judiciary and on arbitrary detention. The US Government have made clear their intention of facilitating such visits. We fully support this dialogue.

We conclude that United States personnel appear to have committed grave violations of human rights of persons held in detention in various facilities in Iraq, Guantánamo Bay and Afghanistan. We recommend that the Government make it clear to the United States administration, both in public and in private, that such treatment of detainees is unacceptable. (Paragraph 87)

34. The Government have made clear to the US Government our concerns about the treatment of detainees in Iraq, Guantanamo Bay and Afghanistan and will continue to do so, as necessary.

We conclude that some British personnel have committed grave violations of human rights of persons held in detention facilities in Iraq, which are unacceptable. We recommend that all further allegations of mistreatment of detainees by British troops be investigated thoroughly and transparently. We further recommend that the Government review its training of and guidance to officers, NCOs and other ranks on the treatment of detainees to ensure that there is no ambiguity on what is permissible. (Paragraph 93)

35. It is already the case that the Service Police investigate all substantive allegations of mistreatment of detainees by British troops. Where such investigations lead to prosecutions being brought under English criminal law, trials are held in open court. This is precisely what happened in the “Breadbasket” case cited by the Committee. In response to this case, the Chief of the General Staff announced his appointment of a senior experienced officer to assess what lessons might be learned from this and subsequent prosecutions. The findings will be published once the MOD is no longer constrained by legal process.

We conclude that the arguments for evaluating information which purports to give details of, for example, an impending terrorist attack, whatever its provenance, are compelling. We further conclude, however, that to operate a general policy of use of information extracted under torture would be to condone and even to encourage torture by repressive states. (Paragraph 104)

We find it surprising and unsettling that the Government has twice failed to answer our specific question on whether or not the UK receives or acts upon information extracted under torture by a third country. We recommend that the Government, in its response to this Report, give a clear answer to the question, without repeating information already received twice by this Committee. (Paragraph 105)

36. The Government agree with the Committee that “the arguments for evaluating information which purports to give details of, for example, an impending terrorist attack, whatever its provenance, are compelling”. As the Committee is aware, the British Government evaluate the reliability of all information they receive before it is passed into the assessment process. They consider, for instance, where the information comes from; what might be the motivation of the source; what kind of reporting record the source has. Where a report is known to derive from a source under detention, that too would be taken into account.
37. This is not the same as operating a general policy of use of information extracted under torture. The Government unreservedly condemn the use of torture and have worked hard with our international partners to eradicate this.

We recommend that the Government set out, in its response to this Report, a full and clear explanation of how its policy on the use of evidence gained under torture is consistent with the United Kingdom's international commitments as set out in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which states, at Article 15, that "Each State Party shall ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made". (Paragraph 106)

38. UK law contains extensive safeguards in relation to evidence obtained by torture. Those safeguards are found in the common law; they flow from the Human Rights Act; and they are contained in statute.
39. The Courts will have regard to the UK's international obligations, including under the UN Convention Against Torture, in exercising these powers.
40. Evidence obtained as a result of any acts of torture by British officials, or with which British authorities were complicit, would not be admissible in criminal or civil proceedings in the UK. It does not matter whether the evidence was obtained here or abroad.
41. It is hard to imagine circumstances in which evidence proved to have been obtained through torture could make its way into proceedings (other than as evidence of the fact of torture in a case against an alleged torturer). Indeed there is no recorded example in the modern era of a British court taking account of evidence that had been established to be the product of torture.

We conclude that the Government should ensure that it is understood by other governments that the mistreatment of British nationals is unacceptable and will be met with appropriate actions. (Paragraph 112)

42. The Government are committed in their efforts to protect and promote the welfare and human rights of British nationals overseas. The Government consider that the mistreatment of their nationals overseas is a serious matter and, as former Minister Bill Rammell explained in his supplementary written evidence to the Committee, when allegations to this effect are made we will raise our concerns with the governments concerned taking into account the specific features of each case. We give careful consideration to appropriate action in individual cases and, once decided upon, this would be communicated properly and promptly to the relevant Government.

We note with approval the Government's stated intention to promote peaceful political and economic reform in Arabic countries. We strongly recommend that the Government continue to place emphasis on the promotion of human rights within those countries. (Paragraph 117)

43. The Government welcome the Committee's agreement on the importance of promoting peaceful political and economic reform in the Arab world. With an increased annual budget of £8.5m the GOF Engaging with the Islamic World Programme continues to fund projects that support the rule of law, good governance and the participation of women. Examples include training Egyptian lawyers in human rights law, supporting reform in Libya's prison system and strengthening human rights capacity in Yemen.
44. The Government will continue to use their influence within multilateral organisations to encourage increased international support for the region's reform efforts. Our G8 presidency will place a heavy emphasis on freedoms and democracy through the implementation of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) initiative. We are also encouraging greater emphasis on EU support for improved standards of governance, particularly through the ten year review of the Barcelona Process.

We recommend that the Government continue to engage actively with all sides in the Middle East conflict, encouraging them to respect human rights and making the point that this will enhance the prospects for an overall peace settlement. (Paragraph 121)

45. The Government agree with the Committee that there appears to be a new spirit and a sense of determination in Israel and Palestine to end the cycle of violence and move towards a negotiated settlement. The Government will continue to work with the parties and the international community to support this process. We will also continue to encourage Israel and Palestine to respect the human rights of all parties, and stress the importance of this in making progress towards a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

We conclude that the security situation in Iraq remains extremely difficult but that, if the new government is to operate well, it should be seen to place respect for human rights and freedoms at the centre of its work. We recommend that the Government continue to offer support to the Iraqis in developing and implementing a human rights capacity. We recommend that the Government support the appointment of a UNCHR Special Rapporteur to Iraq. (Paragraph 128)

46. The Government agree with the Committee's view that the Transitional Government should place respect for human rights and freedoms at the centre of their work. The Government have undertaken a wide range of human rights activities in Iraq over the past twelve months and will continue to offer help in this area. Work undertaken so far has included training officials from the Iraqi Human Rights Ministry to become human rights trainers. We have also helped strengthen the Iraq Special Tribunal by providing training for judges, prosecutors and investigators. We have provided training for forensic scientists to help with the process of reuniting Iraqi families with the remains of their loved ones, when humanitarian mass grave exhumations begin. We are also working with UN and other international partners to establish a National Centre

for Missing Persons and Humanitarian Exhumations. In the South of Iraq we have a police and prisons mentoring team (attached to the British Embassy Office) who assist Iraqi counterparts and help to promote a culture of acceptance for international human rights standards. We will encourage the new Iraqi government to take a strategic approach and will work closely with the new Human Rights Minister. Broad international engagement in support of an Iraqi strategy will be important. We will coordinate our efforts with those of international partners.

47. The next opportunity to consider the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur for Iraq will arise in Spring 2006 at the Annual Forum for the Appointment of Rapporteurs. No country or organisation proposed a rapporteur in the 2005 session. The Government consider that there is little international support for a rapporteur at this stage. But we will continue to engage with international partners on this point, ahead of the Spring 2006 session.

We conclude that the dialogue on nuclear proliferation with Iran should not be allowed to eclipse the very serious human rights concerns which exist in that country and which appear to be worsening. We recommend that the Government set out, in its response to this Report, how it intends to use the dialogue with Iran on human rights over the next year to deliver real improvements. (Paragraph 132)

48. We continue to be concerned about the human rights situation in Iran. Efforts to seek improvement remain a key element of the Government's policy. The EU has also made clear that its relations with Iran can only move forward on the basis of action by the Iranian government to address the EU's political concerns, in areas such as human rights. The Foreign Secretary and other Ministers have raised our human rights concerns with Iranian interlocutors on many occasions and will continue to do so. The EU/Iran human rights dialogue provides an additional forum to press the Iranian authorities. The EU and Iran are discussing how the dialogue might be improved to deliver more effective results. We will also continue to encourage Iran's co-operation with international human rights mechanisms and its compliance with international obligations. The UK and other EU countries co-sponsored a resolution on human rights in Iran, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2004.

We conclude that the Annual Report's increased detail regarding the situation in Saudi Arabia is welcome. We recommend that the Government continue to press the Saudi Arabian government to move towards greater respect for human rights, particularly in respect of equal rights for women within Saudi Arabian society. (Paragraph 136)

49. The Government welcome the Committee's recognition that it has included a good level of detail on Saudi Arabia in the Annual Report on Human Rights.

50. The Government remain committed to encouraging Saudi Arabia to improve its human rights record. We raise our concerns on a wide range of human rights issues at working, ambassadorial and Ministerial level.
51. The Government recognise that there are important developments underway in Saudi Arabia, for example the recent local municipal elections. We welcome the elections as an important step in the reform process in Saudi Arabia and, while disappointed that women were not allowed to vote, are encouraged by Saudi statements that women will participate in the next elections.

We commend the Government for its work to support and enhance the work of the African Union in the human rights field and recommend that in its response to this Report it set out in detail how it intends to “build, consolidate and co-ordinate support for the AU.” (Paragraph 140)

52. In 2005, as G8 President, the Government are working with partners to marshal international support behind the AU's peace and security agenda. We inherited a significant agenda from previous G8 Summits on enhancing African capacity to carry out peace support operations (PSO). We are working with the AU and international partners to deliver on these commitments, and to consolidate the progress already made. In addition, the Government are seeking international support to enhance conflict prevention capacity as highlighted in the reports of the UN High Level Panel and the Commission for Africa, and in support of the AU's plans.
53. The Government are strongly supportive of the development of a comprehensive peace and security strategy and technical capacity within the AU. We are taking forward work with G8, EU, other international donors and African partners to build strategic level management capacity at the AU, and support the development of the standby brigade structures in the regions. We will work specifically with international partners during the course of 2005 in support of the AU's plans on training, transport and logistics, command and control, doctrine and operating procedures. We will also seek international support for building the AU's mediation capacity.
54. Enhancing donor co-ordination is also a key aim for the UK's G8 Presidency. We hope to be able to identify mechanisms that will maximise donor efficiency, and will reduce the administrative burden on the AU.

We conclude that the shocking ongoing human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of Congo represent a failure of the international community's efforts to assist the negotiation of a peace settlement. We recommend that the Government make very strong representations to the governments of Uganda and Rwanda to cease their destabilising activities in the country. We further recommend that the Government support efforts to hold perpetrators of crimes accountable and that it continue to support the efforts of the transitional national government in Democratic Republic of Congo to bring peace to the country. (Paragraph 146)

55. Peace, sustainable development and democracy in the Great Lakes region continue to be a priority for the Government. A peace process is in place in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which the Government have long supported as we attempt to help the DRC end years of horrific conflict, and bring peace and prosperity to the region.
56. The Government and international partners have consistently urged the Rwandan government and DRC's neighbours to work constructively in support of the peace process in DRC, and to respect its territorial integrity. Uganda and Rwanda deny they are destabilising the DRC. We have not seen any concrete evidence to prove that Rwandan or other foreign troops are operating inside the DRC.
57. We have made repeated representations to the Congolese government and to the UN Mission in Congo (MONUC) to apprehend those suspected of gross violations of human rights. We welcome in that respect the International Criminal Court's investigations and further welcome the recent arrest in Kinshasa of several militia leaders.

We conclude that the apparent appalling behaviour of some UN peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo is compounding the problems of that fragile country and bringing the UN into disrepute. We recommend that the Government make the strongest representations to those troop-contributing countries involved to ensure that this behaviour is stopped and the perpetrators brought to justice. We further recommend that the Government set out its suggestions for how this behaviour might be prevented in other UN peacekeeping missions. (Paragraph 148)

58. The Government have supported the actions of the UN Secretary-General in response to these allegations. We welcome the Secretary-General's report, issued on 24 March 2005, on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations Peacekeeping personnel. We will work with partners to ensure that the recommendations contained in the report are fully implemented to prevent further instances of this kind of behaviour, and to ensure that those found responsible for any abuses are brought to justice.

We commend the Government for its aid projects and efforts to secure a peace agreement in Uganda but conclude that its attention has been distracted from the very pressing human rights concerns associated with the conflict. We recommend that the Government, as a significant donor to Uganda, maximise its efforts to stop human rights abuses there and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. (Paragraph 154)

59. Concerns about human rights abuses in northern Uganda are well founded. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) commits the majority of abuses. But Ugandan security personnel have also been identified as abusers and some individuals named in official Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) reports. Such

reports damage confidence among northern Ugandans that the government are serious about protecting the local population.

60. The Government have consistently urged the Ugandan government to address these concerns, including by conducting full investigations and by removing those security personnel who violate human rights from the north of the country.
61. Resolution of the conflict in northern Uganda is directly linked to improving the human rights environment. This will not be easy. But peace will allow the return of a properly functioning civil administration supported by a strengthened role for the police and independent judiciary (and a reduced military and intelligence presence). To achieve this the Ugandan government need to embrace an holistic, coherent, consistent and long-term strategy for peace; and the LRA needs to commit itself to all the above, plus an end to violence, if it expects its concerns to be taken seriously. The Government will continue to support peace efforts wherever possible.

We conclude that the international community's response to the events in Darfur has been slow and inadequate, and that lives have been lost unnecessarily as a result. We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government set out its position on actions to be taken against the government of Sudan to put a stop to the continuing abuses of human rights. We further recommend that the Government set out the lessons learnt from the inadequacy and slowness of the international response over 2003-04 and the actions which need to be taken to improve the response to crises of this nature. (Paragraph 159)

62. Promotion of human rights in Sudan continues to be a priority for the Government. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed on 9 January 2005, offers the best hope for peace across the whole of Sudan, including Darfur. The CPA paves the way for free and fair elections and a truly democratic system of governance and will see an interim government of national unity established in the summer.
63. The Government continue to be gravely concerned by ongoing human rights abuses in Sudan. The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Secretary of State for International Development, and the Minister for Africa all visited Sudan last year and pressed the Sudanese government strongly on the need to stop further human rights abuses and bring those responsible to justice. We continue to insist, bilaterally and through the EU and UN, that both the Government of Sudan and the rebels abide by the commitments they have already made. We will remain engaged at the highest level. We have also made clear to the authorities in Khartoum that the release of development assistance, and our willingness to help address Sudan's debt issue, depend on progress in Darfur.
64. The Government played a leading role in adopting UN Security Council Resolutions 1591 & 1593, which impose sanctions on those who impede the

peace process, or who commit human rights abuses and refers those responsible for the worst atrocities to the International Criminal Court (see also paragraphs 21-22 above).

65. Insecurity remains the main threat to the people of Darfur. The Government continue fully to support the work of the African Union (AU) monitoring mission. Where deployed, the AU troops are making their presence felt. We have already committed more than £14 million in financial support to the AU, which has been spent on logistical assistance including the purchase of over 600 vehicles. They have now decided to increase their presence to 7,500 personnel and we have made clear that we will support them in this. In the long term it is only through a political process to which all sides are committed that the situation in Darfur can be resolved. This is why the Government also fully support the AU-led peace talks in Abuja.
66. The Government will continue to engage with the government of Sudan, both bilaterally and through the regular EU-Sudan Human Rights dialogue meetings, during which we raise our concerns on specific cases and the human rights situation more generally. We are a leading donor to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Sudan. Comprehensive reform of the Sudanese judicial sector is required to ensure that it conforms to international human rights law. Following the signing of the CPA, the Government will be one of the lead donor supporters in this area. We have already committed £7.2 million to a programme of support, which will include training for police and the establishment of key commissions under the CPA protocols. We are also supporting the training and advocacy work of the Sudanese Organisation Against Torture, and are supporting freedom of the media through training programmes with Article 19 and the BBC World Service Trust.
67. In terms of lessons learned, following his speech to the Overseas Development Institute on 15 December 2004, the Secretary of State for International Development put forward a number of proposals to reform the humanitarian system. His proposals include: getting the UN to define a stronger role for UN Humanitarian Co-ordinators; to improve co-ordination and leadership in crises; a new UN Global Humanitarian Fund to enable the UN to react immediately when a crisis strikes and to channel funds to under-funded crises; benchmarks for the standard of performance that the humanitarian system is expected to deliver; and more funding for disaster risk reduction and strengthening UN disaster reduction agencies. The Government are now taking these proposals forward with our international partners.

We further recommend that the Government act in support of the referral of the crimes committed in Darfur to the International Criminal Court, including by persuading the US administration not to oppose it. (Paragraph 160)

68. Please see paragraphs 21-22 above.

We recommend that the Government take steps both to help resolve the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and to put pressure on the Eritrean government to improve its human rights record. (Paragraph 164)

69. The Government raise the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute with both countries regularly and are in close contact with other key international partners on this issue. We emphasise to both parties that the Boundary Commission's border decision is the only basis upon which a lasting peace can be secured. We also urge the parties to engage in dialogue on all the issues separating them and to co-operate fully with international efforts aimed at securing progress in their dispute.

70. The Government are concerned by the human rights situation in Eritrea and raise this issue with the Eritrean government at every suitable opportunity. In addition to our bilateral approaches, we also pursue progress on human rights with our EU partners. Through the EU we have initiated a comprehensive dialogue with the Eritrean government that includes our human rights concerns.

We conclude that the Government's work to isolate and put pressure on the Zimbabwean leadership for its economic mismanagement and deteriorating human rights record remains wholly justified and should be intensified where possible. We recommend that the Government continue to work with Zimbabwe's neighbours, and that it seek to persuade South Africa to use its considerable influence as regional leader to attempt to secure improvements in the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. (Paragraph 169)

71. We welcome the FAC's conclusion that the Government's efforts to isolate and put pressure on Zimbabwe are justified. The Government intend to continue with this policy, working closely with international partners, most notably the European Union. The Committee will be aware that the EU's targeted sanctions were extended on 21 February 2005 for a further 12 months. These will be reviewed by partners following the elections held in Zimbabwe on 31 March, which the EU concluded were flawed and could not be considered free and fair. The Government believe that the failure by the Zimbabwe government to respond to the opportunity provided by the elections and the lack of progress against the wider governance benchmarks set by the EU mean that there is no justification for diluting the sanctions. With international partners we will continue to look at other international instruments to use in order to maintain the level of pressure. In December 2004 the EU tabled a motion on Zimbabwe at the UN General Assembly, and it remains on the UNGA agenda.

72. The government have worked with all members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on the situation in Zimbabwe. SADC members argue that they have employed a policy of quiet diplomacy to engage with the government of Zimbabwe, but we are concerned that Zimbabwe has not responded positively to these efforts. In a statement to the House on 5 April 2005 the Foreign Secretary said that he was surprised and saddened that Zimbabwe's neighbours had chosen to ignore the obvious and serious flaws in

these elections and had declared them fair. We will continue our dialogue with SADC, including South Africa, encouraging them to press for the return of good governance and respect for the rule of law in Zimbabwe. In addition to the governance and human rights concerns, Zimbabwe faces a major humanitarian crisis, which will put more pressure on the region.

We conclude that the actions of King Gyanendra in taking control of Nepal are destabilising and unacceptable. We recommend that the Government use all diplomatic means to secure the return of multi-party democracy to Nepal, as a first step to finding a settlement to the internal conflict in that country. (Paragraph 173)

73. The Government share the Committee's concern about the King's take-over of power in Nepal. Following his actions we registered our concerns in a statement warning that his action would increase the risk of instability in Nepal and undermine the institutions of democracy and constitutional monarchy. We also called for the immediate restitution of multi-party democracy. This was underlined by FCO Minister, Douglas Alexander, when he formally summoned the Nepalese Ambassador to express our concern. The UK Ambassador to Nepal met the King on 8 February and conveyed to him personally the UK's strong concerns about the damage the King's actions had done. We subsequently took the unusual diplomatic action of withdrawing our Ambassador for consultations as a further mark of our disapproval of the King's actions.
74. The Government accept the Committee's recommendation that we should use all diplomatic means to secure the return of multi-party democracy. We continue to work actively for the restoration of democratic freedoms and intend to keep pressing for the return to democratic governance. We remain engaged with the political parties, civil society organisations and human rights defenders and will continue to support them. In the meantime we are keeping our bilateral assistance programmes for Nepal and the assistance provided to the Government under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool under review. We have withdrawn a proposal, laid before Parliament in January 2005 for a tranche of military assistance.
75. The Government took an active role in discussions on Nepal at the 61st session of the UN Commission for Human Rights (CHR61). This led to Nepal signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, under which the Nepalese agreed to accept international human rights monitoring. They have also agreed to the terms of a CHR resolution calling for a number of democratic and human rights benchmarks to be reached, including preserving the integrity and independence of the National Human Rights Commission, the release of political detainees and an end to the state of emergency under which many fundamental rights were suspended.

We conclude that the UK-China Human Rights dialogue is failing to deliver results with sufficient speed, despite the incremental progress described in the Annual Report. We recommend that the Government review the continuation

of the dialogue in this light. We further recommend that the Government set specific goals for the dialogue, with appropriate timescales by which it hopes to achieve them. (Paragraph 179)

76. The Government reviewed our dialogue and broader China human rights policy internally after the May 2004 dialogue round. We also held a similar in-house review and forward look after the latest round. The Government continue to believe that the dialogue process is useful and contributes to incremental positive change, although we look continually to refine and improve it. China's progress on human rights is slow relative to the impressive economic change in the country. But we do not believe that this lack of speed means the dialogue is failing. Engaging with China on human rights is not easy and requires sustained long-term effort. The objectives of the dialogue are ambitious and long term. We assess China's progress towards these goals through the dialogue process and through reporting on the dialogue to Parliament.

We recommend that the Government describe, in its response to this Report, how it co-ordinates the UK-China dialogue with the EU-China dialogue and with other mechanisms available to the UK and EU to encourage positive change in China on human rights. (Paragraph 180)

77. The Government consult with other countries that hold dialogues with China through the Berne Process. We play a full part as an EU member in preparations of the EU Dialogue and EU demarches. As the Presidency we will lead the next EU Dialogue round. The EU dialogue now has a focus, as does ours, and consequently we will try to ensure that all the key human rights issues of concern are raised and discussed at least once a year through either the UK or EU dialogues. Our overall strategy and activities aim to encourage positive change which complements reform in China, for example building up rule of law and encouraging co-operation with UN Special Mechanisms. But we also pursue an advocacy role on issues on which China is less interested and less capable of change – for example difficult topics such as freedom of association or freedom of expression. We also respond to specific concerns or cases that arise on an ad hoc basis and are often brought to our attention by NGOs.

We conclude that the raising of the EU arms embargo on China would send the wrong signal at this time, in the absence of strong undertakings from the Chinese government to address human rights issues. (Paragraph 182)

78. The EU agreed in December 2003 to launch a review of its arms embargo on China. Neither the Government nor the EU have yet made a decision on whether to lift the embargo, which was imposed after the demonstrations in China in 1989. The review continues and will take all relevant factors into account. The EU is also interested in the views of the US and other countries. We do not wish to pre-empt the conclusion of the review and in the meantime continue fully to implement the embargo.

We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government set out its view of the Ordinance Regarding Religious Beliefs and Religious Organisations which recently passed into law in Vietnam and an assessment of its likely impact on religious freedom in that country. (Paragraph 186)

79. The Government are concerned that religious organisations remain subject to too much state control and too many restrictions in Vietnam. We have expressed our view, both bilaterally and through the EU, that freedom of religion should not be conditional on, or subject to, licensing or state permission.
80. The Government have seen some positive trends in Vietnam's adherence to its international obligations with regard to civil and political rights. On freedom of religion, we believe the new Ordinance on Belief and Religion and Prime Ministerial Instruction on Protestantism (introduced in February 2005 ordering local authorities to grant recognition to more Protestant groups) should have a positive, if slow and modest, impact. The Vietnamese authorities have recently eased restrictions on officially recognised Protestant groups and have granted recognition to a number of previously unlicensed Protestant congregations in the Central Highlands region. Vietnam's relations with the Catholic Church are also improving. However, we remain concerned at the situation of the unlicensed Buddhist UBCV Church and non-recognised Protestant groups in the North West Highlands region.

We conclude that the abuses being perpetrated in Burma, in particular against the ethnic Karen, Karenni and Shan people, are appalling and that increased international pressure is needed to address the situation. We recommend that the Government give its assessment of whether or not a policy of genocide against those groups is being pursued by the Burmese government, and what actions should be taken by the international community. We further recommend that the Government use its Presidency of the EU to achieve a common position on action to be taken in the event of Burma being allowed to assume the presidency of ASEAN in 2006. We also recommend that the Government support the provision of assistance to internally displaced persons in Burma. (Paragraph 190)

81. The Government are one of the strongest critics of the Burmese regime's abuses of human rights. We are aware of a consistent pattern of serious violations over many years, particularly against ethnic groups living in conflict areas. These have been highlighted in successive UK co-sponsored resolutions on Burma in the United Nations General Assembly and in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. But we do not consider that the atrocities constitute "genocide", which has a specific definition under international law. Nor does the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Professor Sergio Pinheiro, use this term to describe the situation there.
82. The Government are working actively with European and international partners to urge the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to begin a process of

genuine reform. We agree with many international partners that the best interests of all the people in Burma continue to be served by targeted measures against those responsible for the obstruction of reform and progress, together with support to the poorest and most vulnerable people of Burma. That is why EU Foreign Ministers agreed on 25 April 2005 to renew the measures (which include assistance to the people of Burma in the areas of health and education) in the Common Position on Burma for a further twelve months. The EU is closely monitoring developments and stands ready to consider what further steps it can take to encourage reform.

83. It is too early for the EU to take a decision on the approach it will take to Burma's forthcoming chairmanship of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in July 2006. This will depend on developments in Burma before then. The Government have made clear that we wish to see real progress towards genuine democratisation in Burma including the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. We also use our regular bilateral and multilateral contacts with all ASEAN members, who are key to progress on this issue, to encourage them to press the SPDC to enter into a substantive dialogue with the democratic opposition and ethnic groups aimed at national reconciliation. There is a clear understanding that the prospect of Burmese chairmanship of ASEAN makes the need for change all the more pressing.
84. Most internally displaced people live in sensitive or conflict-affected areas to which international agencies have limited access. Securing increased access to such areas for development agencies is an important objective. We are currently working with international organisations such as the UN to encourage the Burmese authorities to do this. The Department for International Development (DfID) are providing £500,000 to support the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has been able gradually to increase its access within Burma over the last three years and is now operating in significant areas of Eastern Burma (Shan and Karen states and Tenasserim division). We also work with the UN to press the regime for greater access for UN agencies and NGOs to all parts of the country; and support the UN's study of population movement within Burma and its impact on vulnerability and the need for assistance. DfID continue to support work of the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium to meet the needs of refugees in camps in Thailand, providing £550,000 in 2004/05.
85. We are doing everything we can to press the SPDC to begin a genuine and inclusive process of dialogue and reform involving all political parties and ethnic groups in Burma. An end to conflict and a genuine transition to democracy are essential to address the underlying reasons for the displacement of people in Burma.

We conclude that the Russian state faces formidable problems with terrorism but that this cannot be used as a pretext for a failure to respect human rights. We conclude that, in concentrating almost exclusively on Chechnya, the

Annual Human Rights Report does not pay enough attention to the human rights situation in the rest of Russia, and we recommend that the Annual Human Rights Report 2005 include more information on this. We further recommend that the Government make clear at every level that Russia should do more to promote and protect human rights both in Chechnya and in the country as a whole. (Paragraph 195)

86. The Government fully agree with the FAC's conclusion that Russia should not use the serious problem of terrorism that it faces as a pretext for failure to respect human rights.
87. The continuing conflict in Chechnya remains the source of by far the most serious human rights abuses in Europe. Despite some recent superficial improvements, Chechnya still lacks a functioning human rights framework, the rule of law is weak, and there are continued reports of extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detention and torture. Given the seriousness of the human rights problems in Chechnya, we believe that it was appropriate to devote a specific section of the 2004 Annual Human Rights Report to it.
88. But we do not accept that the inclusion of a specific section on Chechnya meant that other human rights issues in Russia were ignored. Throughout the report other human rights issues in Russia were highlighted: refugees (p.149); the judicial system (p.179-180); prison conditions (p.181); torture (p.186); the death penalty (p.189); elections (p. 207-08); religious freedom (p. 217-18); conscientious objection (p.219); media freedom (p.222-23); women's rights (p.236); and disadvantaged children (p.245).
89. The 2005 Report will contain a similarly thorough account of our concerns about the human rights concerns in Russia, as well as information about what we have done to address these concerns.
90. In the coming months the Government will continue to discuss human rights with the Russian Government at all levels, both bilaterally and with our European partners. The Government will next discuss their human rights concerns with the Russians during the bilateral Russia-UK human rights talks, which are scheduled for May 2005.
91. The Government will continue to fund projects that will have a positive impact on the human rights situation.

We conclude that the Government is right to make human rights the primary focus of its relations with Uzbekistan and we recommend that it maintain this stance until real improvements are evident. (Paragraph 199)

92. The Government are grateful for this endorsement of their policy towards Uzbekistan. As this year's Annual Human Rights Report will make clear, the Government remain committed to active - and where necessary critical -

dialogue across a range of issues in their relations with Uzbekistan. Human rights are, and will continue to be, at the core of this dialogue.

93. Former FCO Minister Bill Rammell intended to visit Uzbekistan on 2-3 February 2005. Unfortunately the Uzbek authorities cancelled the visit, referring to a press statement that noted that the Minister would be pressing them on human rights issues. As Mr Rammell stated subsequently: “We have consistently made clear to the Uzbek Government the extent of our concern regarding human rights in their country. It should have been no surprise that a discussion of human rights issues would have been an important objective of my visit.”

We welcome the fact that since 1998 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has published an increasingly comprehensive, well set-out and useful Annual Report on Human Rights. We recommend that the FCO continue this practice. (Paragraph 202)

94. The Government welcome the Committee’s conclusion. We will maintain our dialogue with the Committee and with NGOs, academics, the media and members of the public to ensure that the Annual Report on Human Rights continues to meet their needs whilst also meeting the Government’s objective of reporting on its activities to promote human rights abroad.



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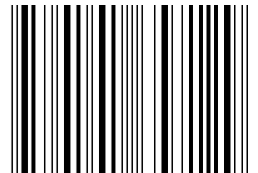
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