

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission

INQUIRY ON “ROBUST PRAGMATISM” IN FOREIGN POLICY: WHAT IT MEANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Summary

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission is holding an inquiry into “robust pragmatism” in foreign policy and what it means for human rights around the world. For that purpose, we are issuing this Call for Evidence, with a deadline of 17.00 UK time on Friday 22 September 2023 for written submissions to be received.

The following document details our Call for Evidence, the scope, terms of reference, methodology and details on how to submit evidence to the inquiry. Please note that although this inquiry is being held by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, the inquiry is not by any means limited to members of the Conservative Party. We invite submissions from individuals and groups of all political persuasions and none, and will work on a cross-party basis on this inquiry.

Introduction

In his first major foreign policy speech, at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet on 28 November 2022, the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak promised a foreign policy that would be “stronger in defending our values and the openness on which our prosperity depends,” that would involve “delivering a stronger economy at home, as the foundation of our strength abroad,” and that would mean “standing up to our competitors, not with grand rhetoric *but with robust pragmatism*”.¹

With the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention at the end of this year, the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission will hold an inquiry over the coming months into the meaning of the phrase “robust pragmatism” and what its implications are, or should be, for the defence and promotion of human rights, the rule of law, democracy and freedom as part of our foreign policy.

The inquiry will focus specifically and exclusively on human rights, given our mandate, but it will take into consideration the intersection between human rights and business, trade, investment and wider geo-political and economic strategic interests, international legal and treaty responsibilities, justice mechanisms, displacement, migration and refugee protection, international development, conflict resolution, defence, security and other relevant policy areas.

¹ The full text of the speech can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-to-the-lord-mayors-banquet-28-november-2022>

Methodology

The inquiry will involve the following:

- An invitation for written submissions, which is the purpose of this Call for Evidence;
- A review by the Commission of all written evidence received, primarily (though not exclusively) from human rights NGOs, civil society, dissidents, lawyers, human rights defenders, journalists, former diplomats, academics, think-tanks, businesses and other experts;
- Three 90-minute oral hearings/evidence sessions, each with 4 witnesses, to be held in Parliament (with the scope to hold further evidence sessions if required);
- Possible reference to secondary source material;
- Publication of a report focusing on the major themes and recommendations which the evidence directs.

Scope of the inquiry

The inquiry will be wide-ranging in scope, within the Commission's mandate to focus on human rights and foreign policy, and the Commission invites written submissions of evidence to include (but not limited to) the following topics:

- Trade, investment, business and human rights
 - The relationship between human rights and trade and investment
 - The use, effectiveness and implementation of economic sanctions – whether targeted Magnitsky sanctions or bespoke sanctions
 - The arms trade
- Diplomacy, multilateral actions, coalition-building with like-minded allies
 - The UK's role within multilateral institutions, especially the United Nations – a review of the UN Human Rights Council, Security Council, UN Special Rapporteurs and other UN mechanisms.
 - “Private” vs “megaphone” diplomacy: how effective is behind-the-scenes closed-door diplomacy (and when), and what is the role of more public pressure, protest, criticism and “shaming” by governments?
 - Building an international united front or a coalition of democracies to co-ordinate efforts to protect and promote human rights
- Conflict prevention and resolution, justice and accountability
 - Justice and accountability for atrocity crimes and UK's role in bringing perpetrators to justice
 - UK role in taking measures to prevent and to punish the crime of genocide, and reluctance to use the definition of genocide.
 - The exercise of “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P)
 - Impact of conflict and oppression on displacement of people interlinked with climate change and mitigation measures.

- Conflict resolution and peace-building
- UK role in capacity building in ‘offender’ countries

- Refugees

- Safe and legal routes– how do we ensure we continue to offer sanctuary and protection to those fleeing genuine persecution and conflict?

- Human rights priorities

- Women’s rights, sexual violence in conflict and gender apartheid
- Freedom of religion or belief
- Freedom of expression
- Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)
- Torture
- The role of Prime Ministerial Special Envoys on thematic human rights concerns
- How to ensure consistency in approach long-term, with changes of government: eg embed the role of Prime Ministerial special envoys, and at the same time “mainstream” human rights – and build on the thematic priorities set by William Hague and Jeremy Hunt in particular during their time as Foreign Secretary: sexual violence in conflict, media freedom, and freedom of religion or belief.

How to submit written evidence

Please submit written evidence in either Microsoft Word or PDF to benedictrogerscphrc@gmail.com no later than **17.00 hours UK time on Friday 22 September**.

Please keep submissions as concise as possible, with an executive summary and key recommendations. If citing online sources and referencing other reports or articles, please include hyperlinks to these for our reference.

About the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission was established in 2005 by The Rt Hon Liam Fox MP, as Shadow Foreign Secretary at the time, and developed by his successor, The Rt Hon Lord Hague of Richmond. Tim Loughton MP was appointed as the Commission’s sixth Chairman in 2022, following his predecessors Fiona Bruce MP, The Rt Hon Sir Robert Buckland MP, The Rt Hon Sir Tony Baldry, The Rt Hon Stephen Crabb MP and Sir Gary Streeter MP. Other key members of the Commission include the Deputy Chairman Benedict Rogers, former Member of Parliament David Burrowes, Baroness Hodgson of Abinger and Luke de Pulford. The Commission’s focus is on international human rights and serves to highlight human rights situations and causes around the world, and make recommendations for foreign policy.