



**Prime Minister should take vital opportunity to usher in a new era for the UK as a champion of human rights and the international rule of law following a period of serious backsliding**

10 July 2024

Dear Prime Minister

Congratulations on your appointment as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. We look forward to working with you to advance respect for the rule of law and human rights in the UK and globally. As Prime Minister you have been handed a vital opportunity to reverse the damage done in recent years and build the UK's reputation as a country that is committed to the international rule of law and will promote human rights consistently.

We recognise your past work in these areas, including your creation as Director of Public Prosecutions, of the War Crimes Community Involvement Panel, enabling our organisations to contribute to ensuring effective investigation and prosecution of international atrocity crimes.

We welcome your pledge to lead a government committed to the international rule of law. The UK's recent approach to its international obligations has been characterised by hypocrisy, double standards and prolific rule breaking. Serious backsliding has weakened rights protections in the UK and damaged the integrity of the international rules-based system at a time when it faces grave challenges. There is an urgent need for the UK to clean up its act.

In recent years a raft of laws and policies have been introduced that flout the UK's international obligations, including by restricting fundamental freedoms, criminalising the right to protest, denying justice to survivors of torture and other serious international crimes, forcing more children into poverty, and effectively banning the right to seek asylum.

We welcome your immediate move to scrap the UK-Rwanda asylum scheme as promising evidence of a turnround under your leadership and we look forward to seeing the UK take responsibility for the asylum claims it receives and deciding these fairly and efficiently. We also look forward to the delivery of your recent pledge to repeal the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act. It is essential that there is no legal or practical immunity for UK nationals for atrocity crimes wherever in the world they are committed.

We urge you to repeal other laws that undermine human rights and the rule of law, such as those stifling peaceful protest, blocking civil claims in relation to abuses committed by British personnel abroad, and criminalising the right to seek asylum. This is essential for the UK's credibility in

promoting human rights globally through its foreign policy. Under your government, the era of “one rule for us and another for them” should be immediately brought to an end.

On the global stage, the UK’s persistent application of double standards in its response to the crisis in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory is an assault on the core principle of the universality of human rights and risks undermining an already fragile international legal order. The status quo of condemning violations of international humanitarian and human rights law on only one side, while turning a blind eye to the other cannot be allowed to continue.

As you are aware, the UK helped to create the International Criminal Court, a critical international accountability mechanism for the gravest international crimes. Recent evidence of a selective approach by the UK to supporting the work of the Court threatens its future and risks causing irreparable harm to international justice, the UK’s leadership in fighting sexual violence in conflict, and the foundations of the international rules-based order that the UK played such a proud role in establishing.

For example, it is critical that your government immediately withdraw the request made by the former UK government to the International Criminal Court’s Pre-Trial Chamber I, where it seeks to argue that the Court cannot exercise criminal jurisdiction over Israeli nationals because of provisions in the Oslo Accords. In one breath the UK is leading efforts on Ukraine before the ICC, and in the next is creating an accountability vacuum for serious crimes committed by Israeli nationals in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

As you know, the rules-based order was born out of the horrors of the Second World War. Its survival impacts the future security of people in the UK, and around the world. At a time of exceptional geopolitical volatility and climate emergency, we urge you to take swift and decisive action to ensure that the UK leads by example in upholding its international obligations, is a principled partner on the world stage, and rejects all attempts to place political point scoring above the law. There are opportunities for your government to demonstrate this leadership at the UN General Assembly in September, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in October, COP29 in Baku, the G20 in Rio, and the Assembly of Parties to the Rome Statute (ICC) in the Hague in December.

This must include urgent action to repeal or amend domestic legislation which erodes rights protections in the UK and an unshakable foreign policy commitment to upholding international law, without exception. These steps will send a strong signal that your government is determined to usher in a new era in which the UK operates with credibility on the global stage as a champion of the laws that were put in place to protect us all.

Yours sincerely

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