



# General Assembly

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## Seventy-fifth session

Item 119 (c) of the provisional agenda\*

### **Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of members of the Human Rights Council**

#### **Note verbale dated 9 September 2020 from the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly**

The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Office of the President of the General Assembly and has the honour to refer to the candidature of the United Kingdom to the Human Rights Council for the term 2021–2023, at the elections to be held on 13 October 2020 in New York.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution [60/251](#), the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations has the further honour to transmit herewith the voluntary pledges and commitments reaffirming that the promotion and protection of human rights are a priority of the foreign policy of the United Kingdom (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations would be grateful if the present note and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 119 (c).

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\* [A/75/150](#).



**Annex to the note verbale dated 9 September 2020 from the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly**

**Candidature of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Human Rights Council, (2021–2023)**

**Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution [60/251](#)**

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland pledges to:

**Promote 12 years of quality education for all girls and work to end violence against women and girls**

We will continue to work to end violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation, child, early and forced marriage, and conflict-related sexual violence through the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. The United Kingdom will ensure a survivor-centred approach to conflict-related sexual violence, and at the 2020 Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative international conference will launch tools to strengthen justice for survivors and hold perpetrators to account. We will continue to work to reduce the impact of conflict on women and girls, and to ensure they participate meaningfully in efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, including as mediators.

With only 10 years remaining in which to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we will continue in our efforts to promote action, by 2030, for all girls to receive 12 years of quality education, as we work towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4. As co-chairs of the Equal Rights Coalition, we have a specific focus on the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations pledge to leave no one behind. The relevance of the Sustainable Development Goals will be an important feature in the upcoming international lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights conference hosted by the United Kingdom.

**Stand up for freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief**

The United Kingdom will continue to be a global leader, and a strong voice internationally, defending Freedom of Religion or Belief. We will raise awareness of the scale and severity of Freedom of Religion or Belief violations and call out States which target and persecute people on the grounds of their religion or belief. We will make full use of mechanisms and procedures to defend Freedom of Religion or Belief, including international meetings, United Nations universal periodic reviews, and other international fora.

In 2019, we commissioned an independent review to look at our work in support of Freedom of Religion or Belief, particularly our work to support persecuted Christians. The review made a series of recommendations, which set out what else the United Kingdom could do on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The Government of the United Kingdom accepted all the recommendations, and work has begun to implement them in a way that will deliver positive change for people of all faiths and beliefs, and of no belief.

**Support democratic values**

The United Kingdom remains committed to promoting and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong

Institutions). A diverse, resilient and effective civil society, including the media, is important for open and inclusive societies, and for holding governments to account.

The United Kingdom will support the participation of human rights defenders and civil society in United Nations business wherever appropriate, and will work to counter instances of reprisals as part of a wider effort to create a safe environment for human rights defenders and civil society representatives. The United Kingdom has a long history of supporting human rights defenders through bilateral engagement and through raising global standards via focused engagement within the multilateral system. We recognize the essential role that human rights defenders have in promoting and defending democracy, and will work within the Human Rights Council to ensure that they are able to fulfil this role. Through our Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, we also continue to support initiatives that defend democratic values and civil society, directly aiding human rights defenders in their causes.

### **Be at the forefront of global efforts to protect media freedom**

In 2019, alongside Canada, we launched the Global Campaign for Media Freedom, and in July 2019 co-hosted the first global conference on media freedom, attended by representatives from government, civil society and media from over 100 countries. Several initiatives were launched at the conference, including a global fund to defend media freedom, an independent legal panel, and the signing of a pledge to protect media freedom including a commitment to actively respond to acute threats, as well as addressing long-term issues. Those countries who signed the pledge formed a Media Freedom Coalition.

As a founding member of the Media Freedom Coalition, the United Kingdom will continue to work with other Governments to promote a free media and create a safe and enabling environment that protects journalists and media workers from harm (Sustainable Development Goal 16.10). Supporting the right to freedom of expression, which is key to the promotion and protection of the full range of human rights, is an essential component of the human rights work of the United Kingdom. As global challenges mount, as a member of the Human Rights Council we will defend and, wherever possible, advance the right to freedom of expression.

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