

Human Rights Council, Fourteenth Session

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right of Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings

UK Speaking Points

We support the EU intervention. The United Kingdom thanks the mandate holders for their reports to this Council.

Mr President,

We agree with Mr La Rue, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, that the right to freedom of opinion and expression is an essential mechanism for the effective protection and promotion of other human rights and an important tool for combating impunity and corruption. As such, the effective enjoyment of this right can be an indicator of the level of protection of other human rights in a particular state.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for addressing in his report the extent to which this right might be limited. The UK recognises those limits set out in the ICCPR and has developed legislation to combat expression that would incite hatred or violence. We believe that the most appropriate way to tackle other forms of offensive speech is through the promotion and protection of freedom of expression ensuring that open debate can be used to challenge such views.

Promotion of freedom of expression and a free media is essential for exposing corruption and fighting discrimination. The UK is concerned about the state of media freedom in all parts of the world, and attacks on journalists. We would like to ask the Rapporteur how he plans to support governments to tackle impunity for such attacks. We would also be grateful for his views on how states might best implement access to information legislation and encourage pluralism of ownership of and access to the media?

- We would be grateful for the Rapporteur's assessment of the situation for freedom of expression in Sri Lanka and his suggestions on what steps are needed to encourage and support media freedom there. In this regard, does the Special Rapporteur have a view on the investigations into attacks on prominent journalists in Sri Lanka, such as the disappearance of Prageeth Ekneligoda (Lanka E News) in January 2010 or the assassination of Lasantha Wickrematunge (Sunday Leader Editor) in January 2009?

- We welcome the recent issue of licences to four new daily newspapers in Zimbabwe. We would be grateful for Mr La Rue's assessment of the media laws there.
- We are aware of concerns relating to freedom of expression and media restrictions in Rwanda and Ethiopia. Does the Rapporteur have any plans to seek visits to these countries in light of such concerns?

Mr President,

The UK would like to thank Philip Alston for his final report to the Council as Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and to record our sincere appreciation for his hard work and dedication to the mandate and its development. We share his view that the activities undertaken by the mandate have mattered a great deal, that lives have been saved and lethal practices abandoned. He deserves real credit for this most significant contribution.

At the same time we recognise the limitations the mandate has faced as a result of 70% of countries failing to respond to visit requests or failing to approve visits. We appeal to all UN members to cooperate fully with the mandate.

Mr Alston, as you prepare to hand over we have a few questions to ask.

1. You mention that much of the mandate's work has been on improving accountability. In Kenya we note with concern that no one has been arrested for the murder of two witnesses who reported to you during your visit in 2009. What is your assessment of the efforts being taken by the Government of Kenya to act against the culture of impunity? What progress do you consider Kenya to have made on security sector reform since your visit?
2. Likewise we should be interested to know your assessment of the current situation in Colombia in the light of the government's efforts and reported improvements. Do you see a need for further engagement from the mandate holder following the Presidential elections?

3. We note that you have sent a very large number of communications to the Government of Iran and would be interested to know whether your correspondence has satisfied you with regard to your concerns in that country?

Finally Mr Alston the UK would like to wish you the very best in your future endeavours.