



# **Eritrea Focus**

***Annual Report  
2018***

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## **Parliamentary activity**

The AGM of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea was held on 29 November 2017, reconstituting the group for a further 12-month session. Patrick Grady (SNP) was elected as Chair.

### **Meeting on EU migration policy covering Eritrea**

On 2 May 2018 the APPG on Eritrea held a joint meeting with the APPG on Refugees and the APPG on Sudan and South Sudan. Chaired by Thangam Debbonaire MP, the event took the form of a panel discussion with contributions from: Duncan Hill, Deputy Head of the East and West Africa Departments, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and a Senior Migration and Modern Slavery Adviser; Dr Lucy Hovil, Senior Research Associate, International Refugee Rights Initiative; Caitlin Chandler, journalist and writer, and Editorial Board Member of Africa is a Country; and two “experts by experience” – a refugee from Sudan and a refugee from Eritrea. The latter was arranged and facilitated by Eritrea Focus, and feedback on the event revealed that his testimony was particularly powerful and well-received.

The meeting considered the effectiveness of the Khartoum Process, the legitimacy of the Sudanese government in taking a central role, and the danger posed to Eritrean refugees – now even more likely to take highly dangerous smuggling routes across the Mediterranean.

During the session, the representative from the Foreign Office suggested that the UK was in favour of the lifting of UN sanctions against Eritrea, which was particularly concerning in the context as talk of a rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia had not yet begun. Eritrea Focus made discussing this with the Foreign Office a priority throughout the rest of the year.

### **Meeting on religious persecution in Eritrea**

On Wednesday 23 May the APPG convened a closed session entitled ‘Religious Persecution in Eritrea: A Crime Against Humanity’, held jointly with the APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief. The session, chaired by Lord Alton (right) – a member of both groups – heard presentations and testimonies from Eritrean faith leaders about the repression and abuses suffered by their different communities.

The APPG made a number of recommendations to the UK Government, as follows:



- *To support the renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea bilaterally, at the European Union and at the United Nations;*
- *To support the findings of the 2016 report by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea;*
- *To exert pressure on Eritrea to fulfil the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations to which it has agreed in a timely manner, and to implement the nation’s ratified 1997 constitution;*
- *To challenge the normalisation of relations with Eritrea to diminish refugee flows;*
- *To encourage the African Union to establish an accountability mechanism to investigate, prosecute, and try individuals accused of committing crimes against humanity in Eritrea, as recommended in 2016 by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea and the UN Human Rights Council;*

- *To encourage the Ethiopian government to implement the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission ruling of April 2002.*
- *To put pressure on the Eritrean government to adhere to its obligations under article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights guaranteeing religious freedoms.*

### **Other activities**

An increasing number of parliamentarians have engaged with the APPG and with Eritrean issues in both Houses. A written question posed by Lord Alton on whether the UK Government had seen substantive evidence of human rights reform in Eritrea was covered by *Africa News*.

Eritrea Focus has forged positive new relationships with MPs and peers, including Dr David Drew MP (Lab/Co-op) and Thangam Debbonaire (Lab), Chair of the APPG on Refugees. Both have agreed to join the Group at the next AGM.

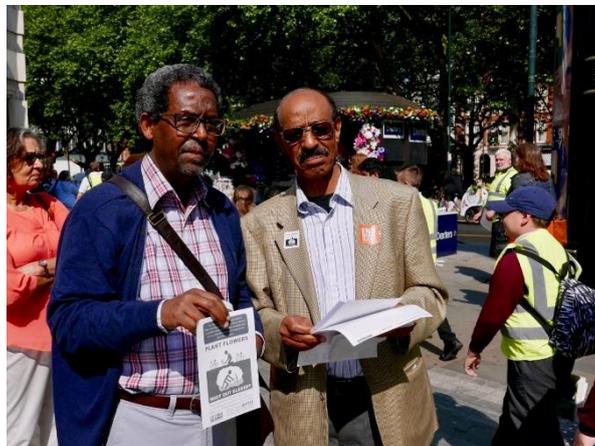
Further joint sessions with other regional APPGs are being targeted for 2019, to build on strong cross-working relationships and opportunities for membership growth.

Eritrea Focus has worked with a number of parliamentarians to table a variety of Parliamentary Questions throughout the year. A selection of these are included in the appendix to this report.

### **Joint action with Freedom United**

In May, members of Eritrea Focus joined with activists from anti-slavery group Freedom United to protest the sponsorship of the Chelsea Flower Show by M&G Investments. They handed out leaflets on the opening and closing days of the show to raise awareness about the role of M&G in the extractive sector in Eritrea. M&G was named in the Eritrea Focus extractive sector report as a major investor in Canadian mining company Nevsun, which owns and operates the Bisha mine, and therefore complicit in the use of kinds of forced labour evidenced in the report. Engagement from members of the public was largely positive, and the action was later reported by Assenna and Eritrea Hub.

Eritrea Focus has forged a strong collaborative relationship with Freedom United in campaigning against the involvement of international mining companies and investors in the Eritrean extractive sector, and looks forward to further opportunities for joint working in this regard.



*Habte Hagos and Petros Tesfagherhis at the 'Plant Flowers, Root out Slavery' protest*

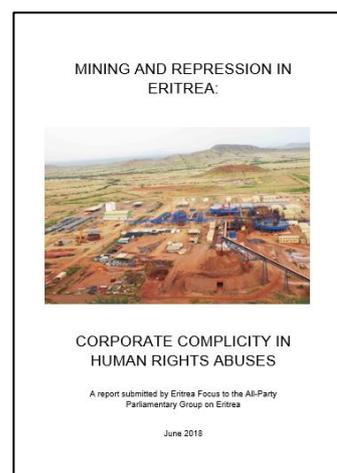
## **Extractive sector report**

The extractive sector report commissioned by Eritrea Focus, titled ‘Mining and Repression in Eritrea: Corporate Complicity in Human Rights Abuses’, was published on 14 June, and shared with the APPG and members of the press. The report looked at international companies’ involvement in the Eritrean extractive sector, and their complicity in the use of forced labour and allegations of mistreatment and poor working conditions. It also featured testimony from Eritrean former miners.

The report was submitted to the APPG on Eritrea and was accepted in a letter from the group Chair, Patrick Grady MP.

Following publication, Lord Alton raised a series of parliamentary questions on the Government’s assessments of the report and British companies’ obligations to comply with human rights legislation. In response, the Government said that the FCO and British Embassy in Asmara “regularly engage UK companies” involved in the sector on their obligations, and would take “appropriate action” against those who failed to comply.

Eritrea Focus will continue to advocate for the adoption of the recommendations made in the report, and work with the Chair of the APPG in 2019 to see that these are achieved.



## **Photo exhibition**

On 4 September Eritrea Focus launched ‘Eritrea in the News’, a photography exhibition charting the country’s history, at the Resource for London. The exhibition was open to the public for a month, and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The exhibition was opened by Lord Alton, and featured on the BBC World Service’s *Focus on Africa* programme, which sent a journalist to cover the opening event. This included an interview with Habte Hagos. A separate interview with Habte was also broadcast on BBC Tigrinya, and the event was covered by Assenna.



Eritrea Focus is currently working on making ‘Eritrea in the News’ a travelling exhibition, whereby the photos are digitised and made available to groups that would like to host it in their own communities.

To coincide with the exhibition at the Resource for London, two events were held on 15 and 22 September: a conference on the Eritrea-Ethiopia peace initiative, and a talk entitled ‘The Push Factor: Why Eritreans are Leaving’. Both prompted lively discussion.

*‘Eritrea in the News’ event poster*

## **Media**

Throughout the year, Eritrea Focus members have offered expert analysis to international media on developments in Eritrean politics, through interviews and commentaries.

As noted above, the photo exhibition “Eritrea in the News” was covered in a number of media outlets, and an interview with Habte about the significance of its contents was broadcast on the BBC World Service and BBC Tigrinya.

Following the UN Security Council vote to lift sanctions on Eritrea on 14 November, interviews were arranged with Habte Hagos and Martin Plaut on ‘Newsday’, the BBC World Service’s flagship international news programme. Their interviews, in which they discussed the current situation in Eritrea and the regional implications of the vote, were broadcast on 15 November and made available through the BBC’s online services thereafter. Eritrea Focus will seek to build upon such media relationships in 2019, with a view to position members as informed and available commentators on Eritrean issues.



*BBC World Service journalist Kim Chakanetsa with Habte Hagos. Kim interviewed Habte at the ‘Eritrea in the News’ exhibition (Credit: Martin Plaut)*

Helen Kidan, appearing in her capacity as a member of the Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (EMDHR), spoke to *The Guardian* for an October article about the Eritrean government’s continuing policy of mandatory indefinite national service, unreformed since the signing of regional peace accords.

Habte was also quoted in *The Defense Post*, while Martin Plaut appeared in *Al Jazeera*, *The New European*, *The Conversation*, *TRT World*, and *Africa Renewal*.

## **Building Democracy in Eritrea Conference**

Funding has been secured for a major conference on the future of democracy in Eritrea, to be held at Senate House, University of London, from 24-25 April 2019. The conference will centre around three core themes – rule of law (Day 1), the economy (Day 1), and working together (Day 2) – and focus on tangible action plans for the post-Isaias transition period. Each day will be focused around a keynote speech followed by a breakout session, where key ideas will be discussed and revised in a collaborative process. The conference will close with an evening of Eritrean music and dance, at a venue TBC.

The conference agenda is being finalised, and potential keynote speakers, break-out session moderators, and delegates will be identified and approached. Invitations will be issued in January.

## **Submission to EU sanctions regime meeting (ongoing)**

Eritrea Focus submitted a document for consideration by the Netherlands working group convening preliminary discussions around an EU human rights-based sanctions regime. The Dutch initiative has now won support from EU member states, and Eritrea Focus will continue to monitor its progress and identify opportunities for engagement.

## **Relationship building**

### **Foreign and Commonwealth Office**



### **Foreign & Commonwealth Office**

Eritrea Focus has held several meetings throughout the year with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and parliamentarians, engaging policymakers and ensuring that they are well informed on current developments and trends.

Following the FCO's appearance at the APPG meeting on the Khartoum Process, Eritrea Focus set up a meeting to discuss the UK's position in relation to the lifting of UN sanctions. This discussion was productive and has resulted in an agreement between the FCO and Eritrea Focus that quarterly meetings will be held throughout 2019.

### **International Bar Association**

Eritrea Focus had a productive introductory meeting with the International Bar Association (IBA), the largest organisation of legal professionals in the world. Conversations included the IBA recognising Eritrea as a human rights priority country, the steps that would need to be taken to enshrine Eritrea's constitution when the country's leadership changes, and the possibility that the Eritrea Law Society (ELS) might join the IBA. The IBA has never previously admitted as a member a law society in exile, as is the case for ELS.

The ELS is run by Eritrea Focus member, Paulos Tesfagiorgis, and joining the IBA would provide access to a range of legal advice and support from members. The process is ongoing.

### **Admitted as country representative to Publish What You Pay**

In 2018, Eritrea Focus was granted membership of Publish What You Pay - a global membership-based coalition of civil society organisations (CSOs) in over forty countries united in their call for an open and accountable extractive sector. This development will provide a platform for Eritrea Focus to advocate for human rights protections in Eritrea's extractive sector.

## Communications

To ensure compliance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and streamline mass communications, Eritrea Focus contact lists were imported to email client mailchimp. Mailchimp will provide a more efficient and secure means of communication with members and supporters.



A bimonthly Eritrea Focus newsletter was launched in September, providing a summary of activities, events, and key developments in Eritrea and the UK. The second edition of this newsletter covering October-November was also issued, and a further December-January edition will be issued in early 2019. Thrice weekly media monitoring reports continue to be issued to a core group of Eritrea Focus members and contacts.

Ahead of Eritrea's election to the Human Rights Council, Eritrea Focus issued an open letter to international organisations including the UN and EU, as well as UK parliamentarians, calling upon them to consider the suitability of Eritrea's election to the HRC in light of its gross human rights abuses. This letter prompted a parliamentary question from Lord Alton on the Government's assessment of human rights reform in Eritrea. (see [Parliamentary activity](#)).

Eritrea Focus also issued a statement ahead of the UN Security Council vote, calling on the British government not to abandon Eritreans in their hour of need, and to maintain pressure on the government of President Isaias to implement internal democratic reforms.

## Website

A new Eritrea Focus website was launched in 2018, to be used as a platform for communicating Eritrea Focus news and events, and sharing materials including public statements and reports. The website also contains information about the APPG.

Eritrea Focus Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts were established and used throughout the year to promote the group's campaigns and messages. Further efforts will be made in 2019 to maintain an active and effective social media presence, to raise the profile of Eritrea Focus and drive engagement with its activities.

[Ends]

## **Appendix**

### **Parliamentary Questions**

#### **Eritrea – Selected Parliamentary Questions 2018**

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Religious Freedom](#)

Answered: 25 January 2018

**David Drew (Labour/Co-op, Shadow Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to the Government of Eritrea on its treatment of religious minorities.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

Our Ambassador and EU counterparts have called for the release of all prisoners detained for religious beliefs or, as a minimum, that they are brought before a court for public hearing and fair trial, allowing them to defend themselves against any charge. We will continue to raise our concerns on this and other human rights issues with the Government of Eritrea.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea and Sudan: Borders](#)

Answered: 31 January 2018

**Patrick Grady (SNP Chief Whip):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the closure of the border between Sudan and Eritrea on the political and economic stability of the wider region.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

The Sudan-Eritrea border has been closed since 6 January. The Sudanese Foreign Minister has made clear that this is due to an internal weapons collection campaign being conducted throughout Sudan. There are no indications, as yet, that this is impacting the stability of the wider region.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Human Rights](#)

Answered: 13 March 2018

**Patrick Grady (SNP Chief Whip):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to help ensure that the Office of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea continues to operate in a credible, neutral and effective manner.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

The United Kingdom continues to encourage the Eritrean Government to cooperate fully with the next Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, and to invite the Rapporteur to conduct a visit. This is the best way to ensure that the Special Rapporteur has a full picture of the human rights situation in Eritrea and the mandate holder is able to support improvements in human rights in Eritrea.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Human Rights](#)

Answered: 13 March 2018

**Patrick Grady (SNP Chief Whip):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he has taken to ensure that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea is renewed.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

We expect that in June 2018 the Human Rights Council will adopt a new resolution which would renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. My officials in London, Geneva and in Asmara are engaged on this issue, and will be having discussions on Eritrea during the March session of the Human Rights Council.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[East Africa: Politics and Government](#)

Answered: 10 May 2018

**Emily Thornberry (Labour, Shadow Foreign Secretary):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the prospects for initiating a dialogue between the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea on normalising relations between those two countries; and what steps he is taking to support the initiation of such a dialogue.

**Boris Johnson (Foreign Secretary):**

I welcome the offer of dialogue with Eritrea made by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy in his 2 April inaugural speech, which will be necessary to end the tensions between those two countries.

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House of Commons  
[Business of the House](#)  
24 May 2018

**Jim Shannon (DUP, Shadow Spokesperson Human Rights):**

In June 2016, the UN commission of inquiry on human rights in Eritrea found reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity had been committed by Eritrean officials against their own people since 1991. This came to the attention of the all-party group on Eritrea yesterday. These crimes include the imprisonment and torture of thousands of followers of various religions, including Christianity and Islam. The mandate of the special rapporteur on human rights in Eritrea comes up for renewal at the UN Human Rights Council in June. It is vital that the UK does all it can to support the renewal of this mandate in order to ensure that the crimes of the Eritrean Government do not go unrecorded. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement on this pressing issue?

**Andrea Leadsom (Leader of the House of Commons):**

The hon. Gentleman often raises appalling human rights abuses, and is absolutely right to do so, and I hear his grave concerns on this subject. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise his concerns directly with Ministers.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question  
[Eritrea: Ethiopia](#)  
Answered: 6 June 2018

**David Drew (Labour/Co-op, Shadow Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent steps the Government has taken to help resolve the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea over Badme.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

We continue to monitor the dispute closely, and welcome the offer of dialogue with Eritrea made by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy in his 2 April inaugural speech, which will be necessary to end the tensions between those two countries.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question  
[Eritrea: Human Rights](#)  
Answered: 6 June 2018

**David Drew (Labour/Co-op, Shadow Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will work with his international counterparts to establish an urgent UN investigation into allegations of extrajudicial killings, arrest, false imprisonment and the culture of official impunity in Eritrea.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

A UN Commission of Inquiry reported at length on the human rights situation in Eritrea in 2016. The Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights has also undertaken four visits to Eritrea since 2014 and started direct discussions with the Government of Eritrea on a number of areas of human

rights concern. The United Kingdom continues to call for the Government of Eritrea to grant access to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Eritrea.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Human Rights](#)

Answered: 6 June 2018

**David Drew (Labour/Co-op, Shadow Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to his Eritrean counterpart on access to Eritrea for the UN Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

The Foreign Secretary has not met his Eritrean counterpart. The former Minister for Africa raised the issue of access for Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group with the Eritrean Foreign Minister when they met in New York in September 2017. The United Kingdom, in its statements at the UN, both in New York and Geneva, has consistently called for the Government of Eritrea to allow access to the Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Labour Camps](#)

Answered: 6 June 2018

**David Drew (Labour/Co-op, Shadow Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what reports he has received on the existence of labour camps in Eritrea; and whether he has made representations on such camps to the Government of that country.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

We are aware that there can be indefinite national service in Eritrea, and that much of the work exacted from the population goes far beyond that of military service. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Permanent Under Secretary and the then Minister of State for Immigration at the Home Office raised the issue with the Eritrean Foreign Minister when he visited London in July 2017. The former Minister for Africa also raised the issue with the Eritrean Foreign Minister when they met in New York in September 2017.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Mining](#)

Answered: 25 June 2018

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench):**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the recent report by Eritrea Focus to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea, Mining & Repression in Eritrea: corporate complicity in human rights abuses, and its implications for Government policy.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Minister of State):**

The Government has received the recent report by Eritrea Focus. Eritrea remains a human rights priority country under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Annual Human Rights Report. The FCO and the British Embassy in Asmara regularly engages with UK companies, and companies with UK investment, involved in the extractive sector in Eritrea. Discussions include their duty to comply with the legislative and regulatory requirements of operating in Eritrea, and the human rights of Eritrean nationals involved in their operations in Eritrea.

The British Government will take appropriate action against companies and/or individuals who fail to comply with the relevant legislation.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Mining: Eritrea](#)

Answered: 25 June 2018

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench):**

To ask Her Majesty's Government how they intend to ensure that British companies directly or indirectly involved in extraction or mining in Eritrea are compliant with (1) UN Security Council Resolution 2023, (2) the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, (3) the Modern Day Slavery Act 2015, and (4) anti-bribery legislation.

**Baroness Fairhead:**

The Government expects and requires that all UK companies involved in the mining sector, including in Eritrea, comply with all relevant legislation and regulations both UK and local, as it applies to their operations.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office regularly meet with UK companies, and companies with UK investors, involved in extractives in Eritrea. Discussions include their duty to comply with the legislative and regulatory requirements of operating in Eritrea and the human rights of Eritrean nationals involved in their operations in Eritrea.

The UK Government will take appropriate action against companies and / or individuals who fail to comply with the relevant legislation.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Mining](#)

Answered: 27 June 2018

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench):**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, following the publication of the report of Eritrea Focus to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea, Mining and Repression in Eritrea: corporate complicity in human rights abuses, whether they have evidence that conscripts are used as slave labour; and what assessment they have made of the implications for companies referenced in any such evidence.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Minister of State):**

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the British Embassy in Asmara regularly engage UK companies, and companies with UK investment, involved in the extractive sector in Eritrea. Discussions include their duty to comply with the legislative and regulatory requirements of operating in Eritrea, and the human rights of Eritrean nationals involved in their operations in Eritrea.

The British Government will take appropriate action against companies and / or individuals who fail to comply with the relevant legislation.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Ethiopia: Eritrea](#)

Answered: 18 July

**Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead (Labour):**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to encourage the government of Ethiopia to implement its declared intention to accept the ruling of the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission and to secure the re-opening of the border between those countries.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:**

The joint declaration of 9 July between the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea covered implementation of the boundary commission decision and links between the two countries. As the Minister for Africa said in her statement of 11 July, the UK remains a steadfast partner to the region and stands ready to provide support to both parties as they work through the details necessary to implement the agreement.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Diplomatic Relations](#)

Answered: 23 July 2018

**David Drew (Labour/Co-op, Shadow Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what plans he has to extend and enhance diplomatic relationships with Eritrea as a result of the recent agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

The UK already enjoys an active diplomatic relationship with Eritrea and Ethiopia, with busy Embassies in both countries.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Refugees: Eritrea](#)

Answered: 17 July

**Richard Burden (Labour):**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the reasons for the yearly variation in the number of applications granted for refugee status from refugees from Eritrea in the last five years.

**Caroline Nokes (Minister for Immigration):**

The Government takes its international responsibilities seriously and grants protection to those who qualify. In assessing claims decision makers must still consider the individual facts and merits of a particular case as well as the objective country information.

The table below is taken from published statistics and shows that the grant rate in 2015 and 2016 fell. This was due to a change to the Country Guidance advice over that time.

Year	Claims	Decisions	Grants	Grant Rate
2013	1387	960	787	82%
2014	3233	2463	2155	87%
2015	3695	3191	1531	48%
2016	2230	1838	1237	67%
2017	1093	1415	1145	80%

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Ethiopia](#)

Answered: 10 September 2018

**Nigel Dodds (DUP, Shadow Spokesperson Foreign Affairs):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on consolidating the end of the state of war recently agreed by the Governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

The UK has engaged extensively with the parties and international partners in support of the joint declaration between the Presidents of Eritrea and Ethiopia. This has included discussion at the UN Security Council, which issued a press statement on 10 July, welcoming the commitment by both parties to resume diplomatic ties and open a new chapter of cooperation and partnership.

The Foreign Secretary has written to Ethiopian Foreign Minister Workneh and expressed, inter alia, our support for the normalisation of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea. He welcomed the positive implications for the stability and prosperity of those countries. Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers have discussed the issue with international counterparts and, earlier in August, the Secretaries of State for Defence and International Development discussed the potential for practical UK support during their respective visits to the region; I will follow this up when I visit Addis Ababa later this year.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: UN Human Rights Council](#)

Answered: 18 October 2018

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench):**

To ask Her Majesty's Government which factors will be considered by the UK when it votes on Eritrea's candidacy for election to the Human Rights Council at the UN General Assembly.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Minister of State):**

The UK considers our votes against candidates' human rights records, and their cooperation with the Human Rights Council (HRC). The UK also considers candidates' track record at the HRC, broader Government priorities, standing obligations, and whether a reciprocal deal can be made. Eritrea will take part in an uncontested election for a seat as one of the Africa Group members in the UN Human Rights Council. The UK has a long-standing policy of not revealing our voting intentions.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Human Rights](#)

Answered: 18 October 2018

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench):**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have seen any evidence of substantive Human Rights reforms in Eritrea since the most recent report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea to the thirty-eighth session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Minister of State):**

The UK has seen no evidence of any human rights reforms in Eritrea since the last session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Minister for Africa raised our concerns on the human rights situation with the Eritrean Foreign Minister when they met on 25 September, and expressed our hope for an improvement in light of political developments in the region.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Djibouti: Eritrea](#)

Answered: 21 November 2018

**Emily Thornberry (Labour, Shadow Foreign Secretary):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the progress of talks between the Governments of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia on resolving ongoing disputes between Djibouti and Eritrea and normalising relations between those countries.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

The United Kingdom supports the position set out in UN Security Council Resolution 2444, notes the Government of Djibouti's statement of 14 November expressing its 'entire satisfaction' with the text, and will continue to support efforts to resolve ongoing disputes between Djibouti and Eritrea and the normalising of relations between those countries.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Sanctions](#)

Answered: 21 November 2018

**Emily Thornberry (Labour, Shadow Foreign Secretary):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what his policy is on proposals to lift the UN arms embargo and other sanctions on the Government of Eritrea.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

The United Kingdom welcomes the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2444 on 14 November, which lifted all UN sanctions relating to Eritrea.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Religious Freedom](#)

Answered: 23 November 2018

**David Drew (Labour/Co-op, Shadow Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the level of religious freedom and tolerance in Eritrea.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

The overwhelming majority of people in Eritrea can practise their religion peacefully and are allowed to do so. However, the detention of individuals and groups from proscribed religious groups, and senior individuals from religious organisations, is of concern. The UK regularly raises this matter at UN Human Rights Council dialogues on Eritrea.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Emigration](#)

Answered: 26 November 2018

**David Drew (Labour/Co-op, Shadow Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what estimate he has made of the number of people seeking to leave Eritrea; and what steps the Khartoum Process is taking to reduce this.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

There are no reliable figures for the number of people leaving Eritrea.

The UK plays a leading role in the Khartoum Process. It is a member of the steering committee, and has ensured the €46 million Better Migration Management (BMM) programme, which supports the Process, includes projects to improve the capacity of governments in the region to manage their borders, alongside the protection and support of migrants. The UK has offered its support to the Eritrean Government's Chairmanship of the Khartoum Process in 2019, drawing on our own experience as chair in 2016.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Political Prisoners](#)

Answered: 13 December 2018

**Emily Thornberry (Labour, Shadow Foreign Secretary):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent estimate he has made of the total number of political prisoners in Eritrea.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

The British Government has made no recent estimate of the total number of political prisoners in Eritrea, but we remain concerned at the use of arbitrary detention as a means to limit freedom of expression and freedom of religion or and belief in Eritrea. I expressed these concerns directly to the Eritrean Foreign Minister when we met in September, as well as our hope that positive developments in the region will lead to improvements in the human rights situation in Eritrea.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: National Service](#)

Answered: 13 December 2018

**Emily Thornberry (Labour, Shadow Foreign Secretary):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his counterpart in Eritrea on (a) ending forced conscription and (b) demobilising those currently subject to forced conscription in that country.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

I raised the UK's concerns on the human rights situation in Eritrea directly with the Eritrean Foreign Minister when I met him in September, including the length and breadth of National Service. I expressed our hope that positive developments in the region will lead to reform of National Service and improvements in the human rights situation in Eritrea.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office Written Question

[Eritrea: Christianity](#)

Answered: 13 December 2018

**Emily Thornberry (Labour, Shadow Foreign Secretary):**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his counterpart in Eritrea on the persecution of members of Christian denominations banned by the Government of that country.

**Harriett Baldwin (Minister of State for Africa):**

I raised the UK's concerns on the human rights situation in Eritrea directly with the Eritrean Foreign Minister when we met in September, as well as our hope that positive developments in the region will lead to improvements in human rights in Eritrea. We are concerned by the detention of individuals and groups from proscribed religious groups, and senior individuals from religious organisations.