



UK accused by Amnesty of 'deliberately destabilising' human rights globally

Description

UK : The UK has been accused by Amnesty International of “deliberately destabilising” human rights on the global stage for its own political ends.

In its annual global report, released today, the organisation said Britain was weakening human rights protections nationally and globally, amid a near-breakdown of international law.

“The UK is deliberately destabilising the entire concept of universal human rights through its appalling domestic policies and politicking,” said Sacha Deshmukh, Amnesty International UK’s chief executive.

The damning Amnesty report said that with UK government policies targeting asylum seekers and other migrants, along with protesters, Britain had breached its international human rights commitments and curtailed protections at a particularly “perilous” time in global history. It said new legislation further eroded the freedom of assembly and expression.

The UK’s Illegal Migration Act, and government rhetoric around it, were in conflict with the UN refugee convention and the European convention on human rights, Amnesty said.

The government had in effect ended the universal application of human rights by “switching off” protections for refugees. Both of these “carve outs” from protections ran contrary to the universal principles of human rights, it said.

The report also specifically condemns the UK for failing to use its leadership role within the UN to prevent human rights violations in Gaza and its weak support for the international criminal court (ICC) investigation into human rights violations in Israel and Palestine. It also highlights Britain’s involvement in arming Israel.

Deshmukh said of Israel: “We’ve got a very deep concern about the UK’s practice of supplying arms and significant components for arms.” About 15% of finished F-35 warplanes, used by Israel, are likely to contain UK parts or components, he said.

“There’s no doubt in my mind that the UK will be judged harshly by history for its failure to help prevent

civilian slaughter in Gaza,” Deshmukh said.

The report also more widely criticises Israel’s allies for the failure to stop the “indescribable civilian bloodshed” in Gaza. In a stark warning to world leaders, the organisation said the world was reaping a harvest of “terrifying consequences” from escalating conflict and the near-breakdown of international law.

Referencing the development of international law and civilian protections after the second world war, Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International’s general secretary, said:

“In 2023, we were plunged back into a future we don’t want, back to a future we were promised ‘never again’.”

The 418-page report points to the US’s use of its veto to paralyse the UN security council for months by blocking the passing of a much-needed resolution for a ceasefire in Gaza, while it continues to arm Israel with weapons used to commit what may constitute war crimes.

Amnesty highlights the “grotesque double standards” of powerful western countries, including the UK and Germany, continuing to shield and thus bolster the actions of Israel, given those states’ well-founded protests over war crimes by Russia and Hamas.

The report paints a bleak picture of the state of human rights across the world, warning that the breakdown of the rule of law is likely to accelerate with the rapid advancement in artificial intelligence, which coupled with the dominance of big technology companies, risked “supercharging” human rights violations if regulation continues to lag behind technological advancement.

Alongside flagrant rule-breaking by Russian forces during their invasion of Ukraine, the growing number of conflicts and human rights violations witnessed in Sudan, where nearly 15,000 people have died in the civil war, as well as in Ethiopia and Myanmar, where more than 1,000 civilians died in conflict in 2023, are cited as major factors in the intensifying deterioration of global protection for civilians.

Neither Myanmar’s military nor the Russian authorities, both of which have received help from China, have agreed to investigate reports of violations.

Speaking at a press conference to launch the report, Callamard said: “When the powerful flout the rule of law, the shield of the law weakens. When the powerful state themselves [to be] above the law, betrayal of the law becomes a response by many more.”

Amnesty’s report found an increasing number of attacks on women, LGBTQ+ people and marginalised communities for political or electoral gain.

It predicted that, during a landmark year of elections around the world and amid increasingly stiff opposition to regulation by big tech companies, technological advances – such as spyware and facial recognition – could be weaponised to discriminate and disinform.

For example, Amnesty exposed how Facebook's algorithms had contributed to ethnically based violence in Ethiopia during the conflict in the country's Tigray region.

He said that he was also "deeply worried" by the Rwanda scheme to send asylum seekers to the African country, after the bill, which excludes the ability of courts to scrutinise issues brought before them, passed its parliamentary stages earlier this week.

"History will look back and say that we gave succour to those governments with authoritarian regimes and others who want to avoid the rule of law" said Deshmukh. "It is deeply worrying and its repercussions could be felt for years to come."

Callamard said: "Amnesty International's report paints a dismal picture of alarming human rights repression and prolific rule-breaking, all in the midst of deepening global inequality, superpowers vying for supremacy and an escalating climate crisis."

BY Karen McVeigh

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