

UK Urged to Tackle Growing Threat of Foreign Intimidation on British Soil

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— Categories: Human Rights



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A new report from the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) has raised concerns over the unchecked rise of transnational repression (TNR) in the United Kingdom, with the committee calling for immediate and decisive action to support victims and hold foreign actors accountable. The report, released today, outlines how authoritarian governments are increasingly emboldened in their efforts to silence dissenters and intimidate exiles, journalists, and diaspora communities within the UK.

According to the JCHR, foreign regimes have exploited the UK's legal and diplomatic systems to target political opponents and human rights advocates. The report criticises current safeguards as insufficient, leaving many victims unclear on how to seek help. The Committee is urging the Government to take a stronger stance against these abuses, calling for comprehensive reforms across policing, law enforcement, and foreign policy.

The Security Service (MI5) has seen a 48% increase in state-threat investigations since 2022, with evidence submitted to the inquiry pointing to various tactics employed by hostile foreign states, including online harassment, coercion, and even physical violence. The report names several countries alleged to have committed acts of TNR on UK soil, among them China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

Lord David Alton, Chair of the JCHR, emphasised the UK's duty to serve as a safe haven for those fleeing persecution. "The UK should be a place of sanctuary and safety, however we are concerned that there is a growth of foreign repression on UK soil that is going unchecked," Alton said. "This risks undermining the UK's ability to protect the human rights of its citizens and those who have sought safety within its borders."

He added that while prominent cases, such as Hong Kong activists facing threats or Iranian intimidation of journalists, are widely known, they may represent only a fraction of the broader threat. The report urges a dual approach from the Government: immediate support for at-risk individuals and a long-term diplomatic and legislative strategy to counter foreign interference.

A key recommendation is the expansion of the new Foreign Influence Registration Scheme. While the inclusion of Iran and Russia on the scheme's enhanced tier is acknowledged as a positive step, the report expresses concern over China's exclusion, given substantial evidence of Beijing's involvement in TNR activities. The Committee recommends that China be added to the enhanced tier without delay.

The misuse of **INTERPOL** (International Criminal Police Organization) red notices is another pressing issue highlighted in the report. Authoritarian states have used these notices to pursue political dissidents under the guise of legitimate criminal charges. Often issued without the subject's knowledge, red notices can lead to detention during international travel. The Committee calls on the UK Government to push for reforms within INTERPOL and establish a formal mechanism to alert individuals when a politically motivated notice is suspected.

Additionally, **SLAPPs** (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) have become a tool for authoritarian regimes to silence journalists, campaigners, and whistle-blowers through costly legal battles. The report encourages the Government to review existing protections, especially in areas unrelated to economic crime, and to introduce broader anti-SLAPP legislation.

Domestically, the Committee warns that law enforcement's understanding of TNR remains patchy. It recommends the creation of a dedicated national reporting hotline, staffed by trained specialists who can support victims and ensure proper referral to the police. Improved police training on TNR, already underway in some areas, should be expanded nationwide and potentially made mandatory.

The report also underscores the need for a national outreach strategy to educate at-risk communities on how foreign regimes operate and where to seek help. As TNR tactics continue to evolve, especially online, the Committee stresses the importance of maintaining responsive legislation and robust policing frameworks.

Finally, the JCHR advises that the UK's diplomatic and trade decisions must factor in a country's TNR record. Failure to address these abuses risks legitimising repressive regimes and encouraging further violations. In serious cases, sanctions or the expulsion of diplomats should be considered.

The findings represent a significant call to action, urging the UK Government to show leadership in defending free expression, the rule of law, and the safety of those who have sought refuge on British soil.