



Unseen Threats, Unheard Voices

Towards Stronger UK Protections Against **TNR**



April 2026

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About the Tackling Transnational Repression in the UK WORKING GROUP

We are an informal coalition, established in September 2024, which convenes concerned parties to research and monitor incidents and the effects of **transnational repression (TNR)** in the UK; to support those affected by TNR; and to identify and shape the development of a comprehensive institutional response to TNR in the UK.

Members of the Steering Committee are:

- Foreign Policy Centre
- Richardson Institute at Lancaster University
- Index on Censorship
- Reporters Without Borders
- The Rights Practice
- Azadi Network
- Amnesty International UK
- Impact Shift

We have over 60 individual and organisational members who include:

- Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
- Carmen Lau - Hong Kong activist and former elected District Councillor
- China Dissent Network
- Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation
- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
- David Tobin - Lecturer in East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield
- FairSquare
- Freedom House
- Hongkongers in Britain (HKB)
- Hong Kong Watch
- All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG)
- International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)
- Iran International
- John McDaniel - Lecturer in Law at Lancaster University
- Laura Murphy - Professor of Human Rights at Sheffield Hallam University
- Martin Plaut - Senior Research Fellow at King's College
- Marymagdalene Asefaw - Journalist and Founder of DESTA Media
- Protection Approaches
- Rizwangul NurMuhammad - PhD Candidate at the University of Sheffield
- Roshan Khattak - Exiled human rights researcher and documentary filmmaker
- Salam for Democracy and Human Rights (SALAM DHR)
- Siena Anstis - Senior Legal Advisor at the Citizen Lab, and PhD Fellow at the Universities of Toronto and Oslo
- State Capture Accountability Project (SCAP)

Foreword

In my capacity as Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR), and as part of the inquiry into transnational repression in the UK, I have had the opportunity and privilege to hear directly from those affected by such acts. The testimonies of victims and survivors are deeply troubling, and similarly, our responses thereto. Individuals who have sought refuge in this country, journalists carrying out their daily work, activists, scholars, artists and others described their experiences of surveillance, threats, harassment and coercion. Some have faced violence, while many more live in the constant shadow of intimidation. These are not isolated incidents, but part of a broader and evolving pattern of behaviour by authoritarian states and state-linked actors who seek to silence independent voices far beyond their own borders.

This booklet, produced by the **Tackling Transnational Repression in the UK Working Group**, helps to bring greater clarity to what has been too often treated as a diffuse or isolated problem. It situates transnational repression not only as a matter of national security, but fundamentally as a question of human rights and democracy. While the cross-border nature of these activities undoubtedly raises issues of sovereignty and security, their primary impact is borne by individuals, by the silencing of their speech and the erosion of the freedoms that underpin democratic life in the UK.

The Working Group's analysis highlights a number of deficiencies in the United Kingdom's response, and in doing so closely reflects the findings of the JCHR's inquiry. As we approach the first anniversary of the JCHR's report, there is still no universally accepted definition of transnational repression used by the UK Government, no comprehensive mechanism for monitoring its prevalence, and no single accessible pathway for victims and survivors to report incidents or seek support, to name but a few gaps. This absence of comprehensive responses has consequences: it contributes to underreporting and leaves those affected uncertain as to where they may turn for help. Beyond that, a failure to address these gaps risks allowing these practices to persist with impunity.



As this booklet makes clear, the tools of transnational repression are varied and so necessitate a varied response. Law enforcement has an essential role to play, but it cannot bear the full weight of a challenge that is, by its nature, transnational and with many manifestations below the criminal threshold. A coordinated approach across government, alongside engagement with affected communities, will be required. The Working Group's proposed four-part approach - to monitor, respond, support, and prevent - offers a practical framework for addressing these challenges.

There is a clear opportunity for the United Kingdom to demonstrate international leadership in this area. This booklet arrives at a moment when awareness of transnational repression is growing, but when policy responses remain in development. The work of the **Tackling Transnational Repression in the UK Working Group**, bringing together expertise from civil society, academia, and advocacy organisations, illustrates how informed, cross-sector engagement can contribute to shaping an effective policy response.

We sit on a precipice, witnessing a shocking rise in international tensions and threats on a scale not seen since the 1930s and 1940s. Democracies must not become inured to the dangers we face. We must take a firm and principled stand to protect our way of life - grounded in the international rules-based order. In this increasingly volatile global landscape, transnational repression cannot be met with complacency by the United Kingdom. The urgency of this challenge has never been greater.

Lord Alton of Liverpool
Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights



What is TNR?

Transnational repression (TNR) — authoritarian coercion across international borders — is on the rise globally.[1] Repressive or authoritarian actors, including powerful and hostile states, have a broadening array of tools to surveil, threaten, harass and attack individuals on foreign soil, violating their fundamental rights guaranteed under international and domestic laws, such as the Human Rights Act in the UK.

Political dissidents and human rights defenders have traditionally been the targets of TNR, but today members of many diaspora communities who face persecution and mass atrocities in their country of origin also find themselves subject to transnational human rights violations here in the UK.[2] [3]

There is a pressing need to address TNR in the UK, as responses to date have been sparse, incoherent and largely inaccessible to targeted communities and individuals. Aside from human rights defenders and members of diaspora groups, there are examples of British academics, journalists, activists and lawyers having also encountered transnational coercion.

TNR has a negative impact at every level of society, from individual rights to national security and democratic institutions. Responses must be similarly multi-layered and comprehensive. The UK Government has an opportunity to take the lead globally in ensuring democratic resilience against the cross-border political and technological challenges of the 21st century's contested world.

This involves not only taking action to prevent TNR, but also ensuring that individuals' rights are protected. In doing so, the UK benefits from creating a more resilient society at home and being able to deploy a more informed foreign policy.





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As a member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, I heard firsthand the evidence that a number of states have engaged in acts of transnational repression on UK soil. We concluded TNR is a “serious and under-recognised threat” that “extends far beyond those directly targeted, creating a broader ‘chilling effect’ on entire communities and undermining fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, assembly, and association”. This is why I support the Tackling TNR in the UK Working Group, and particularly applying a human rights lens rather than security one by centring the lived experience of TNR targets, and I will continue to work with them on pushing for the implementation of the JCHR’s recommendations.”

Alex Sobel

Labour (Co-op) MP for Leeds Central and
Headingley and JCHR Member



“

The Tackling Transnational Repression in the UK Working Group are doing important work to highlight how hostile states are attempting to silence journalists, activists, and academics, and scare whole communities in the UK. As Chair of the APPG on Media Freedom, I have worked closely with Iran International and BBC Persian so I understand the impact TNR has on journalists and their work, and I will continue to press the Government to do more to strengthen media freedom in the UK, including by tackling TNR.”



Sir John Whittingdale

Conservative MP for Maldon
Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary
Group (APPG) on Media Freedom

“

From working closely with the large communities of Hongkongers and Iranians in my constituency I have become deeply concerned about transnational repression in the UK, and particularly the increasing reports from my constituents who fear for their safety and security. This is why I support the important work the Tackling Transnational Repression in the UK Working Group are doing, particularly their calls for proper community engagement, and I will continue to push the Government to do more to address key protection gaps.”

Sarah Olney

Liberal Democrat MP for Richmond Park
and Spokesperson for Business



Background to Tackling TNR in the UK

As a result of the combined effects of evolving digital communications, rising global authoritarianism, and years of neglect by successive governments, TNR and connected rights protection is a major UK policy blind spot.

There has been a failure to effectively monitor the issue, with no clear cohesive strategy to respond to threats or support the needs of those affected, or likely to be targeted, by TNR. In some cases, the UK, is failing to prevent its legal system and professional industries from enabling TNR.

- **There is no official definition of TNR.** The complexity of TNR issues and lack of legally binding definitions, both in international and domestic law, has made the phenomenon, and its effects, challenging to track and measure. Our Working Group defines TNR as: **“Acts or threats against individuals, groups and communities across territorial borders carried out by governments or their proxies, which violate human rights and/or intimidate, control, coerce, or silence dissent.”**
- **There is no dedicated mechanism for reporting TNR.** There remains no clear, accessible point of contact to report or receive support, leaving those targeted hesitant to report. In turn, this also leads to underreporting of TNR cases, concealing the severity of the issue. A lack of institutional support leaves targeted individuals and communities more vulnerable.

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Authoritarian regimes are increasing their attempts to silence those who stand up against them, wherever they are in the world. That includes the Hong Kong Government, who have issued arrest warrants and million-dollar bounties for 19 activists in exile, including 10 who are resident here in the UK.”

Chris Law

Scottish National Party MP for Dundee Central and shadow SNP Spokesperson for Business, Trade and International Development



“

We have heard examples in recent years of BBC World Service correspondents in London having their families intimidated, harassed or even arrested by the authorities in Iran. Those people have nothing whatever to do with the work that their family members are doing here in London, but they are nonetheless paying the price for that freedom to broadcast, that freedom of information and the brilliant work that the BBC World Service does.”

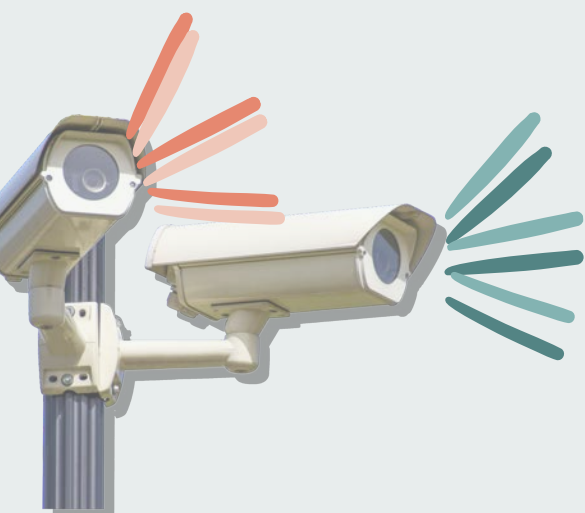
Fabian Hamilton

Labour MP for Leeds North East and Chair of the APPG on Human Rights





- **Government responses have focused on sovereignty and national security over protection of individual rights.**^[4] The Defending Democracy Taskforce, established by the previous Government in 2022, acknowledged the issue of TNR within its broad remit, taking some important and necessary steps to raise awareness among law enforcement agencies.^[5] However, given the cross-border nature of much TNR, UK law enforcement is only part of the solution. In the last Parliament the National Security Strategy (Joint Committee) was supposed to review the work of the Defending Democracy Taskforce, but TNR was not explicitly included in the inquiry's framework.^[6]
- **Inaction on TNR and rights protection is a violation of international standards as well as existing UK law,** namely the Human Rights Act.^[7] The National Security Act passed in 2023 included necessary, but ultimately insufficient, steps to outlaw TNR and protect its targets.^[8] The Act criminalised foreign interference with the exercise of rights protected under the European Convention on Human Rights. Yet the standards of evidence required for criminal prosecution mean many acts of TNR taking effect in the UK will likely not be punishable under the Act.
- **Complicity and inaction of host states and other actors is a central enabling factor for TNR.** The UK should not prioritise trade or bilateral relationships over addressing TNR. This undermines our espoused values as a democratic country and the 'rule of law'.
- **UK institutions, businesses and professions have enabled TNR in the UK.** Institutions, such as UK universities, have pursued partnerships with foreign states perpetrators of TNR without introducing appropriate safeguards for the freedoms of speech and association of staff and students.^[9] UK public relations specialists and lawyers have supported abusive lawsuits and surveillance on behalf of foreign government clients.^[10]



We know that transnational repression is occurring, quite possibly at unprecedented scale and scope, yet we have not seen any significant number of prosecutions [...] Taking action against transnational repression perpetrators, whether through the National Security Act legal framework or some other mechanism, is really crucial."

Dr Andrew Chubb

Richardson Institute for Peace Studies at Lancaster University.
Evidence to the JCHR Inquiry



Common TNR Tactics

TNR is affecting the exercise of basic human rights for a diverse range of targets. The **tactics are diverse and rapidly evolving** and the advance of digital technologies, particularly surveillance capabilities, has exacerbated its coercive effects on individuals and communities.

- Traditional techniques have included **physical surveillance and stalking**, expanding to **overt harassment, intimidation, violence and even murder**.
- **Modern TNR tactics often make use of rapidly developing technology**. Digital surveillance, online harassment, coordinated online attacks and remote coercion can all be delivered via social media and other communication platforms.
- A common tactic is **'coercion by proxy'**, where a perpetrator targets UK residents indirectly via threats to other people, usually family members. [11] This includes coercion of family members based overseas, including use of arrest and detention, travel bans, economic tactics and legal intimidation. [12] [13] The transnational dimension leaves all involved with nowhere to turn and complicates efforts to pursue redress. [14]
- The use of **third party proxies** who appear unrelated to the target (e.g. the use of criminal gangs by Iran to conduct stabbings/assassinations) is an identifiable tactic and also links TNR to various criminal networks. [15]
- **Gendered TNR tactics**, particularly those delivered online (which are often sexualised), and active campaigns to besmirch the reputation of women. [16]
- TNR tactics also involve regime agents and proxies **infiltrating professions**, such as journalism, academia, sports and arts institutions to exert psychological pressure on activists and intimidate communities, leading to self-censorship and a decline in public discourse. [17]
- TNR is often implemented by **local intermediary actors** including law firms, public relations consultancies, self-censoring public institutions, and supporters of repressive states among diaspora communities.
- **Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)** are a legal harassment tool frequently used to shut down public interest reporting, increasingly being used by foreign state actors in the UK.

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We [...] heard from a woman working for BBC Persian, who had the experience of photographs being turned into deepfake pornography and sent to her daughter's school. I ask you to imagine the implications of that being circulated, to your own child's detriment. That is the way in which these things work. I emphasise that there is no example of reasonable cause that could be imagined that could justify it - there really is not. It is very important that we all recognise that.”

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws LT KC
IBAHRI Director and Chair of the High Level
Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom



Common TNR Targets



A diverse and growing array of groups across UK society are currently affected by TNR. These repression techniques affect exiles and diaspora members regardless of their country of origin. In the UK context, examples include:



Activists

Political activists and dissidents from territories including China, Tibet, Iran, Rwanda and the Gulf face surveillance, cyber-attacks, intimidation and threats to their family members in their home countries. In July 2025, the Hong Kong Government issued further arrest warrants and HK\$1 million bounties for 13 exiled Hong Kong activists, six of whom resided in the UK.^[18] ^[19]



Journalists

Journalists reporting on corruption and repression in countries such as Malaysia, Rwanda and Russia have been subject to abusive lawsuits that threaten them with bankruptcy and expose them to serious psychological and professional pressure.^[20] Hundreds of Iranian journalists in the UK have been subject to long-running campaigns of TNR which have included foiled assassination plots and a stabbing in a London residential street.^[21] Journalists exposed to TNR report self-censoring, psychological distress, hypervigilance, disruption to family life and isolation.^[22]



Lawyers

UK lawyers acting for publisher Jimmy Lai, a British citizen arbitrarily jailed in Hong Kong have faced coordinated online threats and cyber-attacks, as have other UK-based advocates for Hong Kong's civil liberties.^[23] Lawyers who represent dissidents have often been the target of TNR.



Academics and students

Students and academics studying authoritarian regimes report needing to self-censor in the classroom.^[24] A survey of 1500 UK social scientists found 67% considered academic freedom to be under threat, with one in five reporting having self-censored when teaching on autocratic countries.^[25]



Diaspora communities

Members of many diaspora communities who have had to flee persecution and mass atrocities find themselves subject to TNR after seeking refuge in Britain.^[26] ^[27] Broad swaths of the Uyghur community in the UK continue to face stifling constraints from Beijing; exiles from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iran, Egypt and Rwanda are subject to targeted digital surveillance and attacks and the threat of imprisonment should they return home; and the UK's Eritrean communities face reprisals if they refuse to pay an enforced 2% tax on their income.^[28] ^[29] ^[30]

“

This is about safety. The Hong Kong diaspora in the UK faces transnational repression, a term that is no longer abstract. In recent months, we have seen surveillance and intimidation of activists, bounties placed on UK residents, physical attacks including the assault of a protester at the Manchester consulate, and attempts to break into the homes of exiled Hongkongers. Those are no longer isolated incidents. They are part of a systemic campaign, and the UK must respond with clarity and courage.”

Bobby Dean

Liberal Democrat MP for Carshalton and Wallington and Shadow Leader of the House of Commons



TNR Testimonial: Iran

I grew up in northern Iran during the 1980s, and in 2009 was recruited by the BBC World Service to work as a journalist for the BBC Persian television channel.

My family were then pressured by the Iranian Government and subject to interrogations, home raids and confiscation of personal assets, including communication devices such as laptops and phones. On several occasions the authorities tried to manipulate me into returning to Iran. One incident that remains particularly painful involved my elderly father, who had been diagnosed with stage four cancer. After interrogating him, state security officials pressured my younger brother to contact me as a guise to send an agent to confront and intimidate me face to face.

Security forces also attempted to influence my journalism directly. My sister was told by officials that I “shouldn’t touch the Supreme Leader and his family” in my reporting. The message was clear: my work was being monitored and my family would pay the price.

Much of the repression I have experienced has taken the form of reputational attacks and defamation. Iranian state actors have used manipulated and deepfake imagery to falsely portray me as a lesbian, knowing that such accusations can carry severe consequences under the current regime. I am not alone in this; many BBC Persian journalists have faced similar campaigns of defamation. My assets in Iran have been frozen, I am prohibited from entering the country, and I have been given criminal status by the authorities.

Through my experiences, I have come to believe that the UK’s reluctance to adopt a clear legal definition of TNR weakens its ability to respond effectively. I have had numerous interactions with the police and other institutions, and I often find that they do not fully understand the nature of the threat because existing structures are not organised to deal with it. Those who understand TNR most clearly are the victims themselves, yet there is often a disconnect between lived experience and official responses.

Negin Shiraghaei
Iranian journalist
Founder of AZADI Network



TNR Testimonial: Hong Kong

My experience of transnational repression did not begin in the shadows; it began with a public declaration. The Hong Kong authorities publicly placed a National Security Law arrest warrant on me, accompanied by a HK\$1 million (approximately £96,160) bounty for my advocacy abroad. This was not an attempt at lawful prosecution. It was the initiation of a bounty hunt – an explicit signal that state repression would extend beyond borders and into my daily life.

What followed was a sustained campaign of transnational repression combining intimidation, surveillance, and psychological warfare. Letters were sent to my neighbours' doorsteps in the UK, my host country, encouraging them to "turn me in". My family members back home were taken in for interrogation; a clear act of proxy coercion intended to punish and restrain me through the people I care about.

The physical threat is not hypothetical either; during protests in the United States, I was physically attacked, and in London, I was followed in the streets by individuals I had reason to believe were acting as agents or proxies. Each incident alone might be minimised; together, they form a coherent pattern of state-directed intimidation.

The purpose of these actions is not only physical harm, but psychological control. The defining feature of my life in exile is permanent uncertainty – never knowing whether a threat will remain latent or escalate. It forces a debilitating regimen of constant self-surveillance: calculating how visible to be, where to appear, and which spaces may no longer be safe. This is repression designed to exhaust rather than imprison, to deter rather than formally prosecute. Even in democratic societies, this reshapes behaviour. One lives with heightened awareness not because danger is always immediate, but because it is intentionally made plausible. This is the method by which fear is normalised and internalised over time.



Carmen Lau

Former elected official from Hong Kong
Pro-democracy advocate now living in exile



TNR Testimonial: China

My research team at SHU researches and documents egregious human rights violations in China – particularly state-imposed forced labour in the Uyghur Region. We published a series of reports between May 2021 and December 2023 that revealed the companies which were complicit in the forced labour and the supply chains that were connected to them.

Starting in the summer of 2022, the Chinese Government began pressuring the university to stop my research. They began by erasing the university's website from the Chinese internet and blocking email correspondence from university addresses significantly affecting the university's ability to recruit Chinese students. By April of 2024, the Ministry of State Security began a series of visits to the university's office in Beijing, aggressively interrogating and threatening the staff there. The foreign intelligence agents interrogated the staff about me and my secondment to the US Government and required them to send a message to the university to shut down my research and research team, stop all publications, and erase my work from the internet. After significant deliberation, the university took the decision to shut down my research team, lay off all of the contractors on my team, end all publication of work on China, and return hundreds of thousands of dollars of funding. All to comply with the demands of a foreign government. When I returned from my secondment, the university told me that they no longer support work on China or forced labour.

There was no consideration of my safety. I was provided with no extra provision of security or training or technology. I was not even directly informed that this was happening, nor did any one check up on me even when they knew that a foreign intelligence service was out there interrogating people specifically about me.

When I did a subject access request and a freedom of information request, I received documents and emails that showed that university administrators had quite explicitly traded my research for access to the Chinese student market.

Dr. Laura Murphy

Professor of Human Rights and Contemporary Slavery at the Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University



TNR Testimonial: Egypt

For more than a decade, my work as an investigative journalist in Egypt focused on documenting human rights violations. I was arrested three times and became a target of the security apparatus.

The targeting did not stop when I left Egypt. I was stopped and questioned in Beirut, placed under surveillance in Nairobi, and later subjected to coordinated attacks in Germany and Switzerland. My case reflects a continuous pattern of TNR carried out by a network linked to foreign state actors, operating across European capitals. The agents who targeted me in Berlin, including the man who physically assaulted me who is based in London, move between EU cities and the UK, where London functions as a central hub and UK-registered companies provide organisational cover.

In 2025, I submitted a full evidentiary dossier to the UK Home Office documenting the network's presence in London. Despite following official channels, including attempts to report to the Metropolitan Police, I encountered significant barriers, including the requirement of a UK postal address, and received only generic acknowledgements. When the individual who assaulted me was later arrested in London, I alerted UK authorities to the cross-border nature of the case. No action followed, and he was ultimately released and returned to Egypt.

On a human level, my life has become a continuous effort to maintain a basic sense of safety. While managing repeated threats, I have come to understand that the deeper intent of TNR is gradual depletion. It wears people down quietly by placing on them responsibilities that should belong to institutions, leaving individuals to navigate alone roles that resemble policing, legal protection, and personal security.

I placed my trust in the UK Home Office and followed its guidance in good faith, submitting my evidence in full despite the considerable bureaucratic obstacles I encountered. As a human rights defender and a direct party to the case, I believe I am entitled to basic transparency regarding how the material I provided has been handled. For me, tackling TNR requires more than just prevention and protection; it demands absolute accountability. Without holding perpetrators and the states that orchestrate these cross-border harms to account, justice remains an illusion, and exile becomes nothing more than a geographical extension of the very prison we were forced to flee.



Basma Mostafa

Egyptian human rights defender living in exile. Director of Programs, Law and Democracy Support Foundation; Co-Spokesperson, Coalition Against Transnational Repression in Germany

Four-Part Approach to Tackle TNR

Many communities, activist groups and individuals are working to challenge TNR through intracommunity support networks, legal actions, media publicity, and policy advocacy. However, this is far from enough in a world of rapidly evolving techniques of cross-border repression and growing authoritarianism worldwide.

TNR is a form of transnational human rights violation, which the Government has responsibility to protect individuals from, as well as providing them access to redress where possible. TNR intersects with issues of national security and foreign interference, but fundamentally constitutes serious violations of individuals' human rights taking effect within the UK's jurisdiction.

As a signatory to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the UK is obligated to ensure the rights recognised in the Covenant to all individuals in its jurisdiction, such as freedom of expression, assembly and association.^[31]

We have developed a four-part approach for the UK Government to tackle TNR, meet the UK's obligations under international and domestic law, and take the lead in improving global democratic resilience.

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The bounties placed on the heads of those fleeing Chinese Communist party repression and autocracy are not just outrageous but a blatant violation of international law. They also expose the lies of Xi Jinping when he says that he is respecting freedoms within Hong Kong. We must take a stand against transnational repression to protect British nationals seeking refuge in the UK.”

Alicia Kearns

Conservative MP for Rutland and Stamford and Shadow Parliamentary Under Secretary (Home Office)



“

Tackling transnational repression is crucial for the protection of democracy, free expression, and civil liberties. People who have come to the UK fleeing persecution and authoritarian regimes deserve to feel safe. The Government needs to do more to hold these hostile states accountable for undermining our democracy and sovereignty.”

Dr Ellie Chowns

Green Party MP for North Herefordshire and Westminster Leader



Monitor



- Provide a clear, accessible and trusted contact point for lodging TNR threats.
- Collect data, research and reports on the prevalence and forms of transnational infringements of UK residents' human rights, in a consistent manner that is regularly made public (e.g. through annual reports).
- Play an active role within the international community (including through the Council of Europe, Interpol, the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism, OSCE and UN) to ensure information and data is shared to help combat TNR at a global level, while also protecting against international mechanisms being abused to further TNR.

Respond

- Inform relevant UK government agencies (across all four nations) to ensure legal threats and actions, extradition, deportation and freezing of assets are not used to violate human rights.
- Raise TNR cases, both individually and in aggregate, through diplomatic channels and in public statements.
- Provide rapid response protection mechanisms for individuals facing serious threats, and ensure coordination between all relevant agencies to warn targeted individuals.

Support

- Provide individuals experiencing TNR with accessible channels of advice and support.
- Support individuals, communities and family members to access legal assistance, humanitarian visas and temporary traveling documents, as well as other potential avenues of redress.
- Provide appropriate physical or digital protections for victims or targets of TNR.
- Develop national guidance and provide training for local and national law enforcement and first responders about transnational repression, including tactics that might not be criminal offences but warrant attention.

Prevent

- Develop evidence-based proposals for necessary legislative and regulatory changes.
- Develop legal and diplomatic mechanisms to penalise perpetrators of TNR.
- Investigate and hold to account UK institutions, systems or professional industries complicit in TNR.

JCHR Inquiry

In February 2025, the Tackling TNR in the UK WG submitted evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) inquiry into TNR in the UK.[32]

The inquiry received 181 written submissions and gave an unprecedented insight into how states and their proxies have crossed state borders to target protected speech and attempt to threaten many groups into silence.[33] The breadth of the evidence provided to the inquiry, highlighting TNR directed by states including Bahrain, China, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, laid bare the scale of the issue.[34]

In July 2025, the JCHR published its report highlighting a number of points that the Working Group has long identified, calling for a robust and urgent response and emphasising the need for TNR-targeted individuals and communities to play a prominent and meaningful role.[35] The report also included a number of welcome and practical steps the UK Government should take as a matter of urgency. These included:

- greater coordination between state agencies and public bodies;
- an accessible hotline for TNR targets;
- mandatory training for police that is not limited to counter-terrorism officers;
- dedicated and tailored guidance and resources for targets available in multiple languages.

In October 2025, the UK Government's response to the Committee's report was published.[36] The Working Group was dismayed by the Government's response, which lacked transparency, an appropriate definition of TNR, and a clear plan of action for meaningful community engagement to inform future policy and practice.

The picture it painted did not correspond with testimony we have gathered from targeted communities, or with our own experience as a Working Group which includes groups directly affected by TNR, most of whom are still unable to access protection and support.

The JCHR inquiry was a unique opportunity to hear from the communities targeted by TNR, civil society and other experts to accurately identify the scale of the issue and explore ways the UK can respond to this evolving challenge. The Working Group sees the Government's response as a significant missed opportunity to seize the momentum and demonstrate the UK is a safe country for those targeted for speaking out.

We were surprised by the Government's description of TNR as "certain foreign state-directed crimes against individuals", which runs counter to the overwhelming body of evidence received by our Working Group and published by the JCHR, which shows that TNR very often manifests through digital means, coercion of family members, and other actions that do not involve crimes being committed within the UK jurisdiction.

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The clear gap in this is that there is no central point or body that understands this issue in a 360 way, documents what is happening, analyses it and tries to provide both support to those who are subject to it and advice and analysis to relevant Government departments or UK bodies, in order for them to be better able and better equipped to address the problem.”

Susan Coughtrie

Executive Director of the
Foreign Policy Centre.
Evidence to the JCHR Inquiry





Restricting TNR protections to acts which cross a criminal threshold leaves many targets unable to secure the support they need. Notably, the Government's description is also narrower than those of the G7 and of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR), placing the UK firmly outside the prevailing international consensus.[37] [38]

We also found the Government's claim that the UK "maintains a hard operating environment" with "system-wide safeguards" against TNR – a claim attributed to the Defending Democracy Taskforce's review – difficult to accept and even harder to verify. This assertion, made without sharing any information about the review with stakeholders, stretches credulity and contradicts the substantial body of evidence submitted to the JCHR inquiry.

The Government's refusal to create a dedicated TNR hotline and reporting mechanism and its insistence that conventional police reporting channels are sufficient for targets in the UK to lodge complaints is deeply disappointing. We know from our experience that existing police routes (999 and 101) are not equipped to respond to TNR threats and have led to under-reporting and mishandled cases. The claim that a bespoke hotline would be "duplicative" and "risks reinforcing the perception that TNR is widespread or ubiquitous", as well as the confident assertion by the Government that call volumes would be low "given the targeted and specific nature of TNR in the UK" ignores clear evidence from the inquiry showing that current systems routinely fail victims, who are passed between agencies without appropriate support.

We are pleased that in recent months we have been invited to meet with the Home Office and share the experiences of our members and our recommendations.

In our response, the Working Group therefore urged the Government to take the following actions:[39]

1. Establish structured engagement with affected communities and civil society.

We urge the Government to develop and publish a formal outreach and engagement plan – with clear actions, timelines, and accountability measures – to involve diaspora communities, researchers, and civil society organisations in shaping the UK's response to TNR. Engagement should ensure that the experiences of those directly affected inform all stages of policy and implementation.

2. Create a dedicated TNR reporting mechanism.

The Government should establish a dedicated and confidential reporting channel – such as a TNR hotline or specialist contact point – to enable those targeted by TNR to report incidents safely and access support. This mechanism should address the well-documented shortcomings of existing police routes (999 and 101), which do not meet the specific needs of many of those targeted by TNR, and assist with reporting and data-gathering.

3. Adopt a clear and comprehensive definition of TNR.

We recommend that the Government adopt an explicit, comprehensive definition of TNR, aligned with international standards and the UK's G7 commitments and in consultation with affected communities. A consistent definition is essential for coherent policy, accurate data collection, and ensuring that all forms of TNR are recognised and addressed across departments.

4. Commit to regular reporting to Parliament on progress.

We recommend that the Government provide annual reports to Parliament detailing progress in tackling TNR. These reports should cover cross-government coordination, international cooperation, data collection, and training provided to law enforcement and other relevant agencies.

What can Members of Parliament do?

Parliamentarians have an important role in supporting TNR targeted individuals and communities, and the civil society organisations working closely with them, including those in the Tackling TNR in the UK Working Group. Parliamentarians can also help ensure this Government delivers on a policy agenda that was acknowledged, but not adequately addressed, by the previous Government.

Tackling TNR is critical to the UK's national security, its democratic institutions, and its role as global champion of democratic governance and the human rights framework, and also fulfils the current Government's election manifesto commitment to "defend our sovereignty and our democratic values".^[40]



Transnational repression continues to threaten our democracy and freedom of ideas. It is clear that foreign interference by hostile states has been creeping into British democracy through disinformation, intimidation, and the silencing of debate.

As Security Minister I set up the Defending Democracy Taskforce to tackle these challenges. I am pleased the Government continues this work but it will not be solved by government action alone, we must all understand the threats and defend our freedoms."

The Rt Hon

Tom Tugendhat MBE VR

Conservative MP for Tonbridge and former Minister of State for Security



Specifically, Parliamentarians could contribute by:

1. Pressing the Government on the following urgent priorities:
 - a. Structured engagement with affected communities and civil society
 - b. Improved reporting mechanisms, protection and support protocols for TNR cases
 - c. Strengthened police training and coordination
 - d. Adoption of international best practices
 - e. Adoption of a clear and consistent definition of transnational repression
2. Holding Government to account on the implementation of the of the JCHR inquiry's recommendations;
3. Engaging with diaspora groups and their representatives in your constituency, to better understand and respond to their concerns;
4. Flagging up TNR constituency cases in Parliament, with Ministers and your local police force; and
5. Directing concerned constituents to service providers which can assist in assessing and addressing their protection needs, and the Working Group website resources.

More resources for supporting constituents affected by TNR can be found on our website:



tackling-tnr.uk

FAQs



Who are the main perpetrators of TNR in the UK?

The Joint Committee on Human Rights' 2025 report on TNR named Bahrain, China, Egypt, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and the UAE as the top perpetrators of TNR within the UK.[41] Amongst the 195 countries in the world today, the governments of ten states are responsible for 80% of all direct, physical incidents of TNR globally since 2014.[42]

Is it only authoritarian regimes who use TNR to go after their critics?

No. Whilst many authoritarian states conduct TNR beyond their borders, any government seeking to silence dissent by targeting critics abroad is perpetrating TNR. India, as the world's largest democracy with almost one billion eligible voters, is a prime example of a democratic nation that has reported cases of perpetrating TNR, specifically targeting Sikh communities in the UK, as evidenced by the Sikh Press Association in 2025.[43] [44] Democratic governments may also perpetuate TNR through the provision of spyware, denying dissenters visa access, and relying upon flawed INTERPOL Red Notices to extradite targeted individuals, putting their lives at risk.

Why is there limited data on TNR?

Understandably, people who experience TNR are often too scared to report incidents, and may distrust the police or security services because of their experiences. For those who do make reports to the police, those reports often do not reach the right teams and the police have only just started their data collection on TNR. For incidents that fall below the criminal threshold, there is no dedicated reporting mechanism, and the lack of a Government definition makes it hard for authorities to collect information on TNR outside of existing legal frameworks.

What has the UK Government done to address TNR?

So far, the UK has addressed TNR as a narrow criminal matter and potential source of national security threats, instead of tackling its impacts on human rights throughout British society. The UK's only legislation which broadly addresses TNR is the 2023 National Security Act. The Act introduced 'foreign interference' against European Convention rights as a criminal offence, although no perpetrators have yet been charged with this crime. In July 2025, the Government enacted the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS), to increase the transparency of activity taking place in the UK at the instruction of a foreign state or foreign state-controlled organisation. As of 2026 no agents, proxies or foreign governments have so far been held accountable under the FIRS scheme.

Why should the UK act against TNR?

TNR is a direct infringement on human rights and freedoms. The UK is obliged to tackle TNR by International Human Rights law, the 1998 Human Rights Act, and their own commitments made at the most recent G7 Summit in Canada 2025. TNR also undermines the democracy and sovereignty of the UK, presents a serious national security risk and threat to the justice system, the right to protest, media and academic freedom.

Who can TNR targets contact for help?

The UK Government currently advises direct contact with law enforcement through 999, or 101 for less urgent cases.[45] Targets are also advised to contact their local MP so that the issue can be directly raised with Government officials and to spread awareness of what constituencies are targeted the most.

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