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By email only to:

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- Secretary of State for the Home Department, The Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP: shabana.mahmood.mp@parliament.uk
- Secretary of State for Northern Ireland The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP: bennh@parliament.uk
- Home Office: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk
- Northern Ireland Office: correspondence@nio.gov.uk

CC to:

- First Minister, Michelle O'Neill MLA: michelle.oneill@mla.niassembly.gov.uk
- Deputy First Minister, Emma Little-Pengelly MLA: emma.little-pengelly@mla.niassembly.gov.uk

Thursday 2 July 2026

Re: Targeted violence and intimidation in Northern Ireland

Dear Prime Minister and Secretaries of State,

We write to you to express our concern about the violence and intimidation across Northern Ireland over the past several weeks, during which – in a reprise of similar events in 2024 and 2025 – perpetrators have targeted migrants, asylum seekers and members of racialised groups. We are concerned that the government's own actions and apparent omissions are directly contributing to this violence, including in ways that may violate international law and that risk contributing to killings, which we believe have become a clear and foreseeable possibility.

In particular, we are concerned that the Westminster government has:



- Directly contributed to the stigmatisation and targeting of migrants, asylum seekers and racialised communities through rhetoric by successive Prime Ministers – including the current one – and Home Secretaries, arguably inciting discrimination, hostility or violence in a manner that violates international law;
- Failed to take adequate steps to prevent potential violations of the right to life as well as the spread of harassment, intimidation and violence directed at migrants, asylum seekers and racialised communities, especially in Northern Ireland but also in Great Britain;
- Failed to ensure effective investigations and remedies for the harassment, intimidation and violence directed at migrants, asylum seekers and racialised communities in Northern Ireland, in a way that could undermine compliance with the UK’s international legal obligations to prevent racism and other discrimination; and
- Failed to ensure sufficient support for people and communities whom racist mobs or organisations have been subjecting to harassment, intimidation and violence.

We have written to United Nations Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups to draw attention to these issues. While this letter follows events in Belfast that began on 8 June 2026, we believe it is important not to lose sight of the bigger picture. In recent years, we have seen similar episodes of large-scale violence in both Northern Ireland (e.g., across Northern Ireland, 2024;¹ Ballymena, 2025²) and Great Britain (e.g., across Great Britain, 2024;³ Epping, 2025;⁴ Southampton, 2026⁵). We are concerned that migrants, asylum seekers and racialised communities have likely suffered other targeted violence, harassment and intimidation at a smaller scale outside of these well-documented episodes.⁶

We are aware that the leadership in Westminster will soon change. However, we are concerned that successive UK governments appear to have had no coherent plan for how to prevent future events such these, and we – as well

¹ See Darran Marshall, ‘Belfast violence: What happened at the weekend?’ (*BBC News*, 5 August 2024): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9wjjr7wq12o>.

² See Rights & Security International, ‘Ballymena statement: Calling out racism in Northern Ireland’ (*Rights & Security International*, 12 June 2025): <https://www.rightsandsecurity.org/impact-post/ballymena-statement-calling-out-racism-in-northern-ireland/>.

³ For an overview, see John Drury *et al*, ‘Understanding the 2024 Summer Riots in the UK: Three Case Studies’ (2026) 36 *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* e70239.

⁴ See Stuart Woodward, ‘Mob caused chaos outside migrant hotel, court told’ (*BBC News*, 2 June 2026): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4g814e4kvo>.

⁵ See Crown Prosecution Service, ‘Thirteen men sentenced following violent disorder in Southampton’ (*CPS*, 12 June 2026): <https://www.cps.gov.uk/wessex/news/thirteen-men-sentenced-following-violent-disorder-southampton>.

⁶ We do not list all incidents here to ensure brevity.



as those who have witnessed the violence first-hand or been involved in community responses to it – are seriously concerned about the recurrence of such violence and intimidation in the near future. We are further concerned about the long-term impacts on people’s human rights in the UK if, for example, migrants, asylum-seekers and people from racialised minority groups feel they can no longer safely live in state-funded housing or move freely in public spaces in Northern Ireland or elsewhere.

In Northern Ireland, we are also concerned about the potential that sectarian paramilitary groups are covertly involved in the violence, and that the UK government continues to fail to investigate and suppress these groups effectively.

We urge you to take action to prevent the next attacks, publicly demonstrate that you have a plan and stop employing rhetoric that – at a minimum – has consistently and harshly stigmatised migrants and asylum-seekers, and is thereby (we submit) directly contributing to the violence against them. We do not make this charge lightly.

Harassment, intimidation and violence directed at migrants, asylum seekers and racialised communities

Large-scale violence and intimidation against migrants and asylum-seekers has been well documented across the UK this year and recently.⁷ For illustration, the latest events in Belfast allegedly involved people who were not law enforcement creating ‘migrant checkpoints’ to stop and turn away people they perceived to be migrants.⁸ Other victims were targeted in their homes. For example, perpetrators have reportedly had access to datasets that told them where people perceived as migrants (ostensibly because of factors such as skin colour) lived.⁹ In Belfast, anti-migrant agitators have apparently circulated ‘hit lists’ of people perceived as migrants in ‘houses of multiple occupancy’ (HMOs), with the local government reportedly being aware of this practice before the most recent mass violence began.¹⁰ (It is unclear where anti-migrant groups may have obtained this personal information.) The alleged perpetrators have confronted people perceived to be migrants in an attempt to force them to leave the area,

⁷ See the sources cited elsewhere in this letter.

⁸ Aamna Mohdin, ‘Police were warned for months about addresses targeted in Belfast riots’ (*The Guardian*, 11 June 2026): <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/jun/11/police-warned-addresses-targeted-belfast-riots>.

⁹ See Connla Young, ‘Students flee Belfast after false reports migrants living in their homes’ (*The Irish News*, 12 June 2026): <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/students-flee-belfast-after-false-reports-migrants-living-in-their-homes-XMAL7N55XJDLJDSYGWZBR5T1TXU/>. This issue is not restricted to Northern Ireland: see Emily Roberts, ‘Stand Up Basingstoke’s aim is to “irritate snowflakes”’ (*Basingstoke Gazette*, 30 April 2026): <https://www.basingstokegazette.co.uk/news/26059367.flag-groups-aim-irritate-snowflakes-mass-scale/>.

¹⁰ Luke Butterly, ‘Belfast City Council was warned of threats to HMOs a year before racist attacks’ (*The Detail*, 15 June 2026): <https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/belfast-city-council-warned-of-threats-to-hmos-a-year-before-racist-attacks>.



before on occasion setting fire to property and vehicles.¹¹ Others have targeted those they perceive to be Roma; mobs also attacked Roma communities in Ballymena around 2025, driving them out of housing.¹²

Intimidation around housing in particular has become a long-term, ongoing harm facing migrants, asylum seekers and racialised communities.¹³ In Northern Ireland, it has historically been paramilitaries engaging in this practice, but in recent years a range of anti-migrant activists appear to have joined in.¹⁴ Some have called for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ‘stop housing illegal immigrants’, or have campaigned for ‘locals only’ housing.¹⁵ We are told that others have threatened landlords in the public and private sector who rent to people perceived to be migrants.¹⁶

As we discuss below, the neither the public authorities in Northern Ireland nor the Westminster government, including the Home Office, appear to have no plan to stop this violence, intimidation and harassment. Moreover, successive UK governments – including the current one – have repeatedly and unfairly linked migrants and asylum-seekers with housing shortages and other pressures on public services, as well as with ‘hotels’ (a word that gives the impression of privileged housing), in statements to Parliament and in speeches. We submit that there is a direct line between this government rhetoric and the decision by the alleged perpetrators in Northern Ireland and

¹¹ Cf. Hannah Al-Othman, “‘My kids are crying’: list of targeted addresses stokes fears across Belfast” (*The Guardian*, 11 June 2026): <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/jun/11/belfast-northern-ireland-list-addresses-social-media-riots-violence>.

¹² See Friends, Families & Travellers, ‘FFT statement on Northern Ireland anti-Roma violence’ (*Friends, Families & Travellers*, 10 June 2026): <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/news/fft-statement-on-northern-ireland-anti-roma-violence/>; Rory Carroll, “The place is empty, a lot have left’: Ballymena weighs up impact of anti-migrant riots” (*The Guardian*, 19 July 2025): <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jul/19/ballymena-impact-anti-migrant-riots-northern-ireland>.

¹³ We addressed this issue in our submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2024, and that content remains relevant today: see Rights & Security International, ‘Submission of Rights & Security International to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the examination of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the 113th session’ (28 June 2024): https://www.rightsandsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/ICERD_Submission_2024_-_Rights_Security_International_1.pdf, paras. 55-64.

¹⁴ See Brett Campbell, “‘Racist’ anti-immigrant posters erected in Newtownards in suspected co-ordinated UDA campaign” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 1 December 2023): <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/racist-anti-immigrant-posters-erected-in-newtownards-in-suspected-co-ordinated-uda-campaign/a475331134.html>.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Jessica Rice, ‘Man forced out of Belfast home after racist graffiti calls for public’s support: “This is a time for action”’ (*Belfast Telegraph*, 30 May 2024): <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/man-forced-out-of-belfast-home-after-racist-graffiti-calls-for-public-support-this-is-a-time-for-action/a1430056720.html>; BBC, ‘West Belfast: Anti-immigration signage a “hate incident”’ (*BBC News*, 29 November 2023): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-67566360>.

¹⁶ Cf. Jessica Rice, ‘Man forced out of Belfast home after racist graffiti calls for public’s support: “This is a time for action”’ (*Belfast Telegraph*, 30 May 2024): <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/man-forced-out-of-belfast-home-after-racist-graffiti-calls-for-public-support-this-is-a-time-for-action/a1430056720.html>.



elsewhere to force people from their homes and try to intimidate those in so-called ‘asylum hotels’. Simply put, the mobs are drawing this link between migrants/asylum-seekers and housing shortages or decaying public services because the government itself does.

Police and government inaction

We are concerned that the police, the national government of the UK and the devolved government of Northern Ireland have manifestly failed to prevent this violence from occurring, even though it has become a predictable and repeating problem; they have also often failed to hold those responsible to account. Regarding the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), we note that, as at 15 June 2026, the force had arrested only 35 people and charged 23 with a range of criminal offences (including riotous behaviour, possession of an offensive weapon, disorderly behaviour and assault on a police-designated person) – numbers that pale in comparison to the reported quantity of people involved in the large-scale violence and intimidation during the relevant time span.¹⁷ We also note that individual police have apparently been declining to intervene during some instances of targeted violence; while there has been speculation that these officers may not have felt safe doing so (a possibility that raises concerns about the force’s training and risk tolerance), we fear that failures to intervene may also be occurring due to political considerations (i.e. a desire not to displease powerful segments of the community in Northern Ireland) or institutional bias against minoritised groups.¹⁸

In response to the recent events in Belfast, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has pledged to give more money to the PSNI.¹⁹ We do not agree with this type of response, at least in the absence of demonstrable reforms and a serious look at why this large-scale violence is happening with virtual impunity. As you will be aware, ‘more policing’ often means a greater criminalisation of minoritised groups rather than greater accountability for the perpetrators of racist or anti-migrant violence, reinforcing existing power dynamics that harm those already marginalised. In the Northern Ireland context, it should also be noted that some commentators have expressed

¹⁷ See Abdullah Sabri, ‘PSNI defends ‘proportionate’ response after racially-motivated riots rock Northern Ireland’ (*Belfast Telegraph*, 15 June 2026): <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/psni-defends-proportionate-response-after-racially-motivated-riots-rock-northern-ireland/a/157250437.html>.

¹⁸ See Hannah Al-Othman and Rory Carroll, ‘There’s wee girls inside’: panic as masked men storm house in Belfast’ (*The Guardian*, 9 June 2026): <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/jun/09/theres-wee-girls-inside-panic-as-masked-men-storm-house-in-belfast>.

¹⁹ Northern Ireland Office and The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, ‘“Our most important duty is to keep the public safe”: Benn announces £4m to support PSNI following public disorder’ (*Gov.uk*, 18 June 2026): <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/our-most-important-duty-is-to-keep-the-public-safe-benn-announces-4m-to-support-psni-following-public-disorder>.



concerns about the PSNI's ability to effectively police communities where paramilitary groups operate.²⁰ Additionally, we are not convinced that simply giving more money to police forces that have not been intervening effectively in the violence to date is going to create a greater willingness or ability to step in and protect migrants and minoritised people. (With that said, we appreciate the frankness of PSNI officials in decrying this violence as 'pogroms'; we understand that some may find this word choice historically inappropriate, but we believe this candid language is helpful in acknowledging the gravity of the situation. In particular, it is helpful that the police are overtly acknowledging the targeted and racist nature of the violence as well as the fact that it appears to be intended to drive out entire families and communities.) You will already be aware of these issues, and not only because racist violence has become a yearly occurrence. For example, regarding housing intimidation, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination told the UK government in 2024 that:

*'the Committee is concerned about reports of paramilitary groups and affiliated individuals perpetrating acts of racist violence and intimidation to deter persons belonging to ethnic minorities and migrants from taking up housing or establish business in certain areas. It is also concerned about information indicating that victims do not always report these acts for fear of reprisals and that the response by the authorities and the police has been ineffective.'*²¹

However, rather than addressing the causes of the intimidation and protecting those subject to it from harm, the authorities' approach in Northern Ireland has been simply to relocate the victims.²²

Witnesses and other affected individuals have also told us about how, in the absence of an official response aimed at protecting people from harm, civil society actors instead have stepped in to provide migrants, asylum seekers and members of racialised communities with the support they needed. For example, several people told us about

²⁰ Where paramilitary groups can often act as 'gatekeepers': see, e.g., Committee on the Administration of Justice, 'Written evidence submitted by the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) regarding the effect of paramilitaries on society in Northern Ireland inquiry', PNI0007, May 2022: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/108540/pdf/>. Further, see Claire Graham, 'Shop owners fear violence after paramilitaries demand protection money' (*BBC News*, 17 February 2026): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c20znn792g1o>.

²¹ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 'Concluding observations on the combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland', CERD/C/GBR/CO/24-26, 23 August 2024, para. 21. (See para. 22 for the Committee's related recommendation.) For more information, see RSI's submission to the Committee: Rights & Security International, 'Submission of Rights & Security International to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the examination of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the 113th session' (28 June 2024): https://www.rightsandsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/ICERD_Submission_2024_-_Rights_Security_International_1.pdf, paras. 55-64.

²² See, e.g., Julian O'Neill, 'Paramilitary intimidation leads to homelessness, report finds' (*BBC News*, 5 December 2023): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-67625315>.



how they and others have provided transport, shelter and food to those fleeing the violence.²³ They did so to fill the gaps left by the authorities – gaps that should not exist.

As you will be aware, both the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which the UK is a party, impose a positive obligation on the state to protect the right to life – without discrimination. As the situation stands, there is a clear, imminent risk that someone targeted by these mobs is going to be beaten to death or die in a fire. Historically, the term for such deadly, targeted mob violence is ‘lynching’; while that word has not generally been used in relation to the UK in the past, we believe it is imperative for the government to use its imagination and understand how easily such a crime could happen in the current environment if the state does not take strong, effective measures to prevent it. In our view, the UK is obligated to make much greater efforts to prevent what is otherwise beginning to look very much like an inevitability.

Further, Article 26 of the ICCPR requires the UK to afford all people ‘equal and effective protection against discrimination’, while the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) requires the government to end discrimination (Article 2(1)(d)) and provide protection for people at risk of racist violence (Article 5(b)).

Successive governments’ contribution to the stigmatisation and targeting of migrants, asylum seekers and racialised communities

In recent years, successive UK governments have frequently and directly contributed to the stigmatisation and targeting of migrants, asylum seekers and racialised communities. The current Prime Minister and successive Home Secretaries in the ruling Labour government have contributed to this issue by, for example:

- Constantly referring to and criticising ‘asylum hotels’ (accommodation for asylum seekers) in a manner suggesting that asylum seekers were being housed in ‘expensive’ facilities at a high cost to the taxpayer, and in some instances recommending that asylum seekers be housed in military barracks.²⁴

²³ See, further, Saman Javed, “‘Terrified’ Belfast Muslims have expected racist violence for months’ (*Hyphen*, 10 June 2026): <https://hyphenonline.com/2026/06/10/belfast-northern-ireland-violence-riots-racist-muslims-terrified/>.

²⁴ See, e.g., Yvette Cooper, ‘Immigration System’, Hansard, vol 767, 12 May 2025, cols 61, 66-68; Yvette Cooper, ‘Migration and Border Security’, Hansard, vol 758, 2 December 2024, cols 41-45, 50-51, 53, 58-59; Shabana Mahmood, ‘Asylum Seekers: Hotels’, Hansard, vol 780, 9 February 2026, cols 536-537; Shabana Mahmood, ‘Asylum Policy’, Hansard, vol 775, 17 November 2025, col 547.



- Portraying asylum seekers as people who migrate to and work in the UK illegally, ‘jump the queue’ of immigration by paying ‘evil people-smugglers’, are a burden on ‘British taxpayers’ and ‘have no right to be here’.²⁵
- Rhetorically linking asylum seekers arriving via small boats that cross the English Channel with ‘gangs’, ‘criminal industry’, ‘fake papers’, ‘illegal jobs’, ‘illegal migration’ and weakened national security, and saying that people who arrive this way should never be able to obtain British citizenship.²⁶
- Regularly rhetorically linking migration with criminality and deception, and claiming that ‘a significant number’ of ‘legal’ migrants feed ‘illegal migration’ by overstaying and/or claiming asylum.²⁷ (As an aside, we note that claiming asylum is not, in fact, illegal.)
- Blaming migrants for lowering wages and driving unemployment among ‘UK residents’, while (for example) highlighting the case of an asylum seeker who ostensibly ‘had enough money to acquire an Audi’.²⁸
- Depicting businesses that sponsor migrants as ‘contributing to the forces that are slowly pulling our country apart’.²⁹
- Suggesting that migration is causing the UK to become an ‘island of strangers’.³⁰

²⁵ See, e.g., Yvette Cooper, ‘Border Security and Asylum’, Hansard, vol 752, 22 July 2024, cols 384-387.

²⁶ See, e.g., Yvette Cooper, ‘Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill’, Hansard, vol 762, 10 February 2025, cols 58-132; Yvette Cooper, ‘English Channel: Illegal Small Boat Crossings’, Hansard, vol 752, 29 July 2024, cols 1013-1014; Shabana Mahmood, ‘Topical Questions’, Hansard, vol 778, 6 January 2026, col 17.

²⁷ See, e.g., Yvette Cooper, ‘Immigration System’, Hansard, vol 767, 12 May 2025, cols 47-50; Home Office and The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, ‘Oral statement to Parliament: Immigration white paper’ (*Gov.uk*, 12 May 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/immigration-white-paper-oral-statement>; Border Security Command, Home Office and The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, ‘Home Secretary speech at the Organised Immigration Crime Summit’ (*Gov.uk*, 31 March 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretary-speech-at-the-organised-immigration-crime-summit>; Shabana Mahmood, ‘Migration: Settlement Pathway’, Hansard, vol 775, 20 November 2025, cols 895-896.

²⁸ See, e.g., Home Office and The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, ‘Oral statement to Parliament: Immigration white paper’ (*Gov.uk*, 12 May 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/immigration-white-paper-oral-statement>; Shabana Mahmood, ‘Asylum Policy’, Hansard, vol 775, 17 November 2025, cols 518-519.

²⁹ See, e.g., Prime Minister’s Office and The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP, ‘PM remarks at Immigration White Paper press conference: 12 May 2025’ (*Gov.uk*, 12 May 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-remarks-at-immigration-white-paper-press-conference-12-may-2025>; Shabana Mahmood, ‘Illegal Migrants: Pull Factors’, Hansard, vol 780, 9 February 2026, col 541.

³⁰ Prime Minister’s Office and The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP, ‘PM remarks at Immigration White Paper press conference: 12 May 2025’ (*Gov.uk*, 12 May 2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-remarks-at-immigration-white-paper-press-conference-12-may-2025>.



Such statements by the current government are building on a rhetorical history of which you will be fully aware, including statements by recent Conservative governments that:

- Inaccurately linked migration with housing pressures in the public mind, such as by stating that ‘[m]ore than one third of all new housing demand in Britain is caused by immigration’ and that ‘without the demand caused by mass immigration, house prices could be ten percent lower’.³¹
- Linking asylum seekers with ‘dangerous foreign criminals’.³²
- In reference to migrants, using language such as ‘go home’ (a phrase historically linked to anti-South Asian racism in the UK) and ‘back to where they belong’.³³
- Linking migrants to claims for social welfare benefits and ‘pressure on public services’.³⁴
- Referring to ‘economic migrants masquerading as asylum seekers and elbowing women and children who need help and support out of the way’ – thus depicting asylum seekers as deceptive, and social support as a zero-sum game, which we view as a recipe for resentment and ultimately violence.³⁵
- Insinuating that asylum-seekers are secretly wealthy by repeatedly referring to people arriving on small boats as ‘those with the means to pay smugglers’.³⁶
- Insisting that even ‘the levels of legal migration to this country are too high’.³⁷
- Repeatedly naming and stigmatising migrants of specific nationalities, such as by referring to ‘Albanian criminals and immigration offenders’, ‘illegal migrants from Albania’, and ‘illegal arrivals from Albania’, while boasting about large numbers of removals of Albanian nationals from the UK.³⁸
- Depicting children who speak English as a second language, and ‘mass immigration’, as factors that make ‘real community’ in the UK impossible.³⁹

³¹ See, e.g., Immigration Enforcement, UK Visas and Immigration and The Rt Hon Theresa May, ‘Home Secretary speech on ‘An immigration system that works in the national interest’ (*Gov.uk*, 12 December 2012): <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretary-speech-on-an-immigration-system-that-works-in-the-national-interest>; Regina Serpa, ‘Election 2024: migrants aren’t to blame for Britain’s housing crisis’ (*University of Sterling*, 18 June 2024): <https://policyblog.stir.ac.uk/2024/06/18/election-2024-migrants-arent-to-blame-for-britains-housing-crisis/>.

³² See, e.g., Priti Patel, ‘Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda’, Hansard, vol 716, 15 June 2022, cols 291-293; Priti Patel, ‘Nationality and Borders Bill’, Hansard, vol 705, 8 December 2021, col 447.

³³ See, e.g., Rishi Sunak, ‘Engagements’, Hansard, vol 743, 17 January 2024, cols 818-819; BBC News, ‘Eleven immigrants left home after seeing ‘go home’ van adverts’ (*BBC News*, 31 October 2013): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24755547>.

³⁴ See, e.g., Rishi Sunak, ‘Engagements’, Hansard, vol 750, 22 May 2024, col 867.

³⁵ See, e.g., Priti Patel, ‘Channel Crossings in Small Boats’, Hansard, vol 704, 22 November 2021, cols 23-44.

³⁶ See, e.g., Priti Patel, ‘New Plan for Immigration’, Hansard, vol 691, 24 March 2021, cols 921-924.

³⁷ See, e.g., Rishi Sunak, ‘Engagements’, Hansard, vol 750, 22 May 2024, col 867.

³⁸ See, e.g., Priti Patel, ‘Albanian Migrants’, Hansard, vol 719, 5 September 2022, col 13.

³⁹ See, e.g., BBC News, ‘In full: David Cameron immigration speech’ (*BBC News*, 14 April 2011): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-13083781>.



- Linking Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities with criminality.⁴⁰

As you will know, human rights obligations fall upon the UK state, such that the cumulative impact of these earlier statements must be considered even though the party of government has changed.

We cannot overstate how pervasive this harmful UK government rhetoric has been for over a decade, including under the current government, and we believe there is a direct line between this explicit government blaming of migrants and asylum seekers for social inequality, housing shortages and crime, and the violence we have been seeing. There appears to us to be a causal relationship between the government choosing to depict people born abroad as a dangerous, invading enemy and as competition for scarce resources, and mobs throughout the UK deciding to attack these very same groups while expressing the very same justifications (and also attacking UK-born people of colour along the way). World history provides many illustrations of the fact that when political leaders imply that a particular group is responsible for a country's economic woes (especially when such statements are accompanied by insinuations that the group in question is secretly wealthy or gaming the system), this is a recipe for mass violence against the group. You will no doubt be aware of this phenomenon, and in our view, this well-documented pattern means the UK government knows or should know that the rhetoric it is using is inflammatory.

We have also noted with concern the recent practice of police in the UK (upon the Home Office's direction) of disclosing a suspect's ethnicity/national origin and immigration status following high-profile alleged crimes.⁴¹ The Home Office has claimed that this practice helps to 'counter misinformation' – and we recognise that previous events have been the subject of significant misinformation regarding the alleged perpetrator's identity.⁴² However, in practice this approach has simply exacerbated false narratives about migrants and asylum seekers being more likely to commit criminal offences – narratives this government and the preceding ones have done much to create

⁴⁰ Priti Patel, Speech to the Board of Deputies of British Jews, 15 September 2020, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VUdOlo8Lm0>. See, further, Adam Ramsay, 'Tories accused of 'fanning flames of racism' against Gypsy/Travellers ahead of UK election' (*OpenDemocracy*, 10 December 2019): <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/tories-accused-of-fanning-flames-of-racism-against-gypsytravellers-ahead-of-uk-election/>.

⁴¹ For an overview, see Daniel Sandford, 'What are the rules around police giving out a suspect's nationality?' (*BBC News*, 5 August 2025): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cm21evz732eo>; Rajeev Syal, 'Cooper 'pandering' to Farage by ordering publication of foreign criminals' nationalities' (*The Guardian*, 22 April 2025): <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/apr/22/home-office-foreign-criminals-nationalities-uk>.

⁴² See, e.g., Behavioural Insights Team, 'The role of local media in communities affected by the summer riots (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 17 March 2026).



– as well as persistent racist myths about minoritised groups in the UK.⁴³ Indeed, such an approach of disclosing the alleged perpetrator’s national origins and immigration status also preceded the violence in Northern Ireland this month.⁴⁴

We are concerned that when considered cumulatively, several aspects of the rhetoric of this government and the most recent ones could rise to the level of a breach of Article 20 ICCPR, which requires states to prohibit (and, by implication, not engage in) ‘any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence’. We fear that the rhetoric in which this and recent governments have been engaging, in the aggregate, amounts to advocacy for hatred of non-UK nationals living in the UK, and particularly asylum-seekers and certain other groups such as Albanians, in a manner that incites hostility and displays of aggression designed to drive people to leave the UK. We also believe it would defy reality to ignore the fact that many asylum-seekers come from racially minoritised groups and that the public is aware of this. With that in mind, we are concerned that in UK government rhetoric, the term ‘asylum-seeker’ has come to operate as a racist dog whistle – and that the government knows this.

For similar reasons, we are concerned that UK government rhetoric about migrants and asylum-seekers, considered cumulatively, could amount to the promotion or incitement of racial discrimination in violation of Article 4(c) of CERD. In its case law, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (which oversees states’ implementation of CERD) has held that politicians who have made statements such as those which we outline in this letter (for example, the blaming of specific ⁴⁵unavailability of social assistance) amount to the promotion of racial discrimination.□ The Committee has also emphasised that it holds governments to a higher standard than commentators or other members of the public, because ⁴⁶ far greater capacity to legitimise discrimination and hostility.□ We submit that the UK government’s language, which has, at least on some occasions, targeted asylum-seekers or specific groups of migrants in a racially coded way, amounts to the promotion or incitement of racial

⁴³ For an explanation of this narrative, see Haroon Siddique and Michael Goodier, ‘Are asylum seekers really more likely to commit violent crime in the UK?’ (*The Guardian*, 14 December 2025): <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/dec/14/truth-about-crimes-committed-by-foreign-nationals-uk>.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Steerpik, ‘Sudanese knife attack suspect ‘had leave to remain’’ (*The Spectator*, 9 June 2026): <https://spectator.com/article/sudanese-knife-attack-suspect-had-leave-to-remain/>; Shawn Pogatchnik, ‘Appeals for calm in Northern Ireland after Sudanese man arrested over knife attack’ (*Politico.eu*, 9 June 2026): <https://www.politico.eu/article/appeals-calm-northern-ireland-after-sudanese-man-arrested-knife-attack/>.

⁴⁵ See Communication No. 34/2004, *Gelle v. Denmark*, Opinion, 6 March 2006, U.N. Doc. CERD/C/68/D/34/2004; Communication No. 43/2008, *Adan v. Denmark*, Opinion, 21 September 2010, U.N. Doc. CERD/C/77/D/43/2008; Communication No. 48/2010, *TBB-Turkish Union in Berlin/Brandenburg v. Germany*, Opinion, 10 May 2013, U.N. Doc. CERD/C/82/D/48/2010.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘General recommendation No. 35’, 26 September 2013, U.N. Doc. CERD/C/GC/35, para. 15.



discrimination under Article 4 CERD.

In sum, we are concerned by your acts and omissions in first contributing to, then failing to respond to, the hatred-based violence we have seen recently in Belfast and elsewhere in the UK. We are further concerned that, to date, you have failed to offer any clear, specific plan to stop similar violence in the future. Indeed, community-level activists in Northern Ireland who aid people displaced or intimidated by the violence have told us that they are simply waiting for the next attack to occur. In the meantime, it appears to us that this government is breaching international law by using rhetoric that contributes to the stigmatisation of migrants, asylum seekers and racialised communities, and then by failing to prevent such violence, harassment and intimidation from occurring.

We urge you to take action to prevent the next attacks, hold those responsible to account, and to stop employing rhetoric that has consistently and harshly stigmatised migrants and asylum seekers – with predictable results.

We invite you to contact us to discuss your plans for preventing mob violence against migrants, asylum-seekers and racialised minorities in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

Sincerely,
Rights & Security International