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UPDATES TO THE UK'S MAGNITSKY SANCTIONS REGIME

The introduction of Global Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Sanctions Regulations 2026 (SI 2026/1071)

20 October 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK government has repealed and replaced its human rights sanctions regime. The new regime, entitled the Global Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Sanctions Regulations 2026 ('the new Regulations') came into force on 15 October 2026.[1]

The new Regulations **broaden the grounds** under which a person may be designated. In addition to the existing grounds, a person may now be designated for:

- carrying out activity which, if carried out by or on behalf of a State within the territory of that State, would amount to a serious violation of an individual´s **right to liberty or security of person** (new **Regulation 4(2)(d)**)
- an activity which constitutes a **serious violation of international humanitarian law** (new **Regulation 4(3)**)
- an activity which constitutes **obstruction of the delivery or distribution of, or access to, humanitarian assistance** (new **Regulation 4(4)**).

The new Regulations also allow for the Secretary of State to designate a class of persons **by description**, including for example, designating all members of an organisation that is itself an "involved person".

The new Regulations were announced by Foreign Secretary Ed Milliband in an oral statement on Israel-Palestine delivered in the House of Commons on 8 September 2026, with the express aim of "enabl[ing] swifter action to deter settlement expansion". Brought in as part of a package of measures to respond to the "moral emergency in Palestine", the new regime will also allow the government to use **Magnitsky-style sanctions more effectively** to deter violations around the world, including by increasing their use as a core tool to combat human rights and international humanitarian law abuses.

The new Regulations more clearly encompass often-overlooked violations, such as **conflict-related sexual violence**, and the expanded grounds will allow the Government to more easily deploy Magnitsky-style sanctions as a tool **to pressure foreign States to release UK citizens arbitrarily detained abroad and deter and condemn the practice**.

The maintaining of provisions allowing for the multilateralisation of Magnitsky-style sanctions allows an opportunity for the UK to act as **a global champion of Magnitsky-style regimes** by encouraging wider adoption, coordinating designations with partners, and defending against improper and politicised use of sanctions.

Background

The advent and growing use of Magnitsky-style sanctions has been a major development in accountability for human rights abuse and corruption. The targeted sanctions freeze perpetrators' assets and stop them from travelling internationally. They are used by the UK, US, EU, Australia and Canada, together representing over one third of global GDP. In the UK, Magnitsky-style sanctions stop perpetrators from accessing London, the world's second largest financial centre and the world's largest luxury property market. Targeted sanctions are most effective when the various jurisdictions work together to close perpetrators off from financial markets.

[1] Stephen Doughty, Minister of State at the FCDO, signed SI 2026/1071 on 12 October 2026, and the regulations came into force three days later. As a made-affirmative instrument, SI 2026/1071 will lapse unless both Houses approve it within 28 days of being made.

The UK global human rights sanctions regime was initially introduced on 6 July 2020. It authorised the imposition of financial and immigration sanctions on individuals in order to deter and provide accountability for involvement in certain serious human rights violations. The regime was introduced by the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations 2020 ('the old Regulations'). This has now been replaced with the Global Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Sanctions Regulations 2026 ('the new Regulations') which came into force on 15 October 2026.

The power to make sanctions regulations derives from section 1 of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018. Under the new Regulations, the UK government can continue to impose asset freezes and travel bans on designated persons. Existing designations will continue to apply under the new Regulations.

Key Changes

The new Regulations **broaden the activities for which an individual can be designated**. Previously, an individual could only be designated for an activity which, if carried out by or on behalf of a State within the territory of that State, would amount to a serious violation by that State of an individual's –

- right to life,
- right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,
- right to be free from slavery, not to be held in servitude or required to perform forced or compulsory labour.

The new Regulations **expand** this definition to include:

- an activity which if carried out by or on behalf of a State within the territory of that State, would amount to a serious violation by that State of an individual's right to liberty and security of person (new **Regulation 4(2)(d)**),
- an activity which constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law (new **Regulation 4(3)**),
- an activity which constitutes obstruction of the delivery or distribution of, or access to, humanitarian assistance (new **Regulation 4(4)**).

The new Regulations more clearly encompass often-overlooked violations, such as **conflict-related sexual violence**, which in addition to often amounting to torture, may also constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

Designation by Description

Procedurally, the new Regulations introduce the power for the Secretary of State to designate persons by description, in addition to the existing power to designate persons by name (new **Regulation 5**). The power to designate by description is new in the UK's Magnitsky-style sanctions, although already exists elsewhere in other UK sanctions regimes. The Secretary of State may now designate a class of persons by description, including all members of an organisation that is itself an "involved person" (new **Regulation 5(2)(7)**).

Coordination with the US, the EU, Australia and Canada

The new Regulations continue to allow for an urgent procedure whereby the Secretary of State can designate a person by name where the US, the EU, Australia or Canada have made a similar designation, and where the Secretary of State considers it to be in the public interest to make a designation under the urgent procedure (new **Regulation 6**), although subject to procedural safeguards including a time lapse.

This provision will allow for continued multilateralisation of sanctions with partners. Human rights and anti-corruption sanctions are more impactful and arguably seen as more legitimate when they are multilateral. The UK government can and should play a leading role in driving multilateral coordination on sanctions, and the new Regulations continue to allow for this.