

Amnesty International UK
Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights
Transnational Repression in the UK
February 2025

Amnesty International UK is a national section of a global movement of over 10 million people who campaign for every person to enjoy all rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards. We represent more than 670,000 supporters in the United Kingdom. We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion.

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Introduction:

The focus of this submission is on the pattern and impacts of transnational repression targeting Hong Kong diaspora and Chinese international students resident in the UK. It reflects the [lived experience and policy recommendations of UK-based Hong Kong activists](#) and civil society groups and the testimonies of students living in fear of China's repression, as documented in Amnesty International's report 'On my campus, I am Afraid: China's Targeting of Overseas Students Stifles Rights'¹.

Our key observations and recommendations in summary:

1. The UK government needs to recognise and respond to transnational repression as a human rights issue rather than through a national security lens as "state threats". This requires adopting a rights-centred approach, with a cross-governmental response that encourages policymaking departments, frontline agencies, NGOs, human rights experts and diaspora communities affected to collaborate on a national strategy and learning from best practices, to ensure that the UK's response is accessible, safe, and effective in meeting the needs of those affected.
2. The Home Office, with support from the FCDO, leads the government's efforts on transnational repression. However, it is still challenging for civil society actors to establish effective and regular communications with relevant officials. Engagement often depends on the pre-existing working relations with specific departmental teams and desk officers, and their responsiveness varies considerably. Staff rotations and other changes in government can also lead to the loss of established relationships, institutional memory, and shifts in government priorities and political momentum. These inconsistencies increase the difficulty for civil society to meaningfully contribute to government policies and practices against transnational repression.

¹ Amnesty International (AI), "On My Campus, I am Afraid" China's Targeting of Overseas Students Stifles Rights", Index: ASA 17/8006/2024, May 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ASA1780062024ENGLISH.pdf>

3. As part of the inquiry, we urge the UK Government to take the following steps and actions towards addressing transnational repression of Hong Kong diaspora communities, activists and Chinese international students residing in the UK:
 - a. Adopt a multi-disciplinary policy response and actions to transnational repression, extended beyond focusing on criminalisation and securitisation. Effective solutions need to incorporate policing, intelligence gathering, digital security, diplomatic engagement, community services, psychological support for the affected communities, in addition to enhanced awareness training across government departments and frontline agencies.
 - b. Ensure the communities have safe avenues to raise concerns, as well as to monitor the efficacy and responsiveness of the government actions. It is important to put in place a transparent and accessible mechanism to allow targeted individuals to report transnational repression.
 - c. Make clear to the public the specific roles and responsibilities of government departments and frontline agencies in response to transnational repression. Relevant departments and their officials should maintain in close communication and collaboration with the affected communities and NGOs on an overarching national strategy and best practices. They should further formalise such engagements with the civil society and ensure sharing of information across departments.
 - d. Track, document and regularly publicise incidents and patterns of transnational repression incidents on UK soil. The information would help civil society actors to monitor the situation and develop their own risk assessments and mitigation plans based on credible official data.
 - e. Establish a reporting mechanism and dedicated hotline with an integrated information platform to handle reports and complaints related to transnational repression. The communities susceptible to transnational repression need an accessible contact point — in languages that affected individuals can comfortably read, write and speak where they can access professional support and government resources.
 - f. Provide training to frontline agencies and civil servants who may encounter survivors of transnational repression or their families, ensuring they possess the knowledge, skills and sensitivity to manage these complex and sensitive situations.
 - g. Ensure accountability for the violations and abuses committed by the suspected perpetrators. The UK has the duty to investigate, prevent and end the rights violations, by prosecuting those that amount to criminal acts and providing victims remedy and reparation promptly, effectively and thoroughly.

A. Definition and understanding of Transnational Repression

Should the Government adopt a formal definition of transnational repression? What should be the key elements of a definition?

4. Amnesty International defines transnational repression as “government actions to silence, control or deter dissent and criticism by human rights defenders, journalists, academics, opposition activists and others, especially from that country, who live in another country, in violation of their human rights”.²
5. Acts of transnational repression may involve one or more rights-violating acts directed against targeted individuals or groups, including:

Extrajudicial executions; physical or verbal assault; unlawful transfers between states; abductions; abuse of arrest warrant and Interpol Red Notice; digital threats and censorship; harassment and intimidation (including family members in the home country); denial of consular services and unlawful surveillance.
6. Besides inflicting harm on those targeted and their families, these tactics create a significant chilling effect on the wider diaspora communities and the enjoyment of their rights. Determining whether these actions are attributable to state actors with concrete evidence can be difficult, but the similarities in allegations reported by a wide range of witnesses globally demonstrate some noticeable patterns of repression that the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities and their agents are engaging in.
7. Currently, there is no clear working definition by the UK government on what constitutes “transnational repression” that is comprehensive enough to capture its varying forms and threat levels. An official definition would help enhance awareness of transnational repression and alignment across departments and amongst officials to address the rising threats, uphold democracy and safeguard human rights. However, the scope of the definition should not be too narrow and restrictive, excluding the complex and ever-changing nature of the risks or threats against the diaspora communities.

How does transnational repression impact (a) those targeted and (b) their wider communities?

8. Amnesty International works in close partnership with diaspora communities and activists at risk to research and document the impact of transnational repression on the exercise of their human rights and well-being. Amnesty International’s May 2024 report “*On my campus, I am Afraid*”, documents a pattern of intimidation, harassment and surveillance faced by overseas students from mainland China and Hong Kong, including in the UK. Our research evidence concludes that transnational repression is being carried out by the Chinese authorities.³ In September 2024, Amnesty International UK convened representatives from over 20 organisations, including Hong Kong diaspora groups, human rights organisations, journalists

² Amnesty International (AI), “On My Campus, I am Afraid” China’s Targeting of Overseas Students Stifles Rights”, Index: ASA 17/8006/2024, May 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ASA1780062024ENGLISH.pdf>, p.49

³ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), p.7

and scholars, to share their experiences of transnational repression in the UK and the pervasive climate of fear it creates.⁴

9. Extraterritorial National Security Laws induce legal threats and fear

- a. The respective national security architectures in China and Hong Kong fuel fear among the diaspora that their free expression and activities could lead to reprisals, due to the claimed extraterritorial effects of several national laws.
- b. In China, expansive view of national security has long negatively impacted the rights of human rights activists, including lawyers and writers, and their families. In 2014, a new law enforcement initiative (“Operation Foxhunt”), supported by changes in 2018 to the Criminal Procedure Law, further spelled out that efforts to pursue “sensitive” individuals – whether accused of national security-related crimes, corruption, or bribery – could extend beyond China’s borders. The 2018 National Supervision Law created a supervisory organ for public officials to “carry out overseas pursuit” of officials who have left China. Tactics used by law enforcement under these laws have included threats against family members in China, coercion by police and officials abroad to make individuals return to China. But also abuse of formal legal mechanisms such as Interpol Red Notices and extradition requests.⁵
- c. In Hong Kong, China’s top legislature imposed the National Security Law (NSL) in 2020 proscribing crimes of “secession”, “subversion”, “terrorism” and “collusion with foreign forces”,⁶ while Hong Kong’s own legislature passed the Article 23, its first homegrown national security ordinance in 2024.⁷
- d. The Hong Kong government has claimed extraterritorial jurisdiction over diaspora Hongkongers. The most significant case is the warrants and bounties against prominent exiled activists,⁸ with their passports being cancelled violating their rights to freedom of movement.⁹ Another instance is that of a Hong Kong permanent resident sentenced to two months in prison for sedition, as a result of posting on social media while studying at a university abroad. The individual was arrested after returning to Hong Kong.¹⁰

10. Physical assault, verbal harassment and disruption of diaspora protests

⁴ Amnesty International UK (AIUK), “Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK: lived experience and recommendations from Hong Kong diaspora community groups”, Nov 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/roundtable-transnational-repression-uk-lived-experience-and-recommendations-hong-kong>, p.1

⁵ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), p.25-26

⁶ Amnesty International, “Hong Kong’s national security law: 10 things you need to know”, 17 July 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/hong-kong-national-security-law-10-things-you-need-to-know/>

⁷ Amnesty International, “Hong Kong’s national security law: 10 things you need to know”, 17 July 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/what-is-hong-kongs-article-23-law-10-things-you-need-to-know/>

⁸ Amnesty International, “Hong Kong: Absurd cash bounties on overseas activists designed to sow fear worldwide”, 14 December 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/12/hong-kong-absurd-cash-bounties-on-overseas-activists-designed-to-sow-fear-worldwide/>

⁹ Article 19, “Hong Kong: Escalation of transnational repression against exiled activists must end”, 24 December 2024, <https://www.article19.org/resources/hong-kong-escalation-of-transnational-repression-against-exiled-activists-must-end/>

¹⁰ See Amnesty report “On my campus, I am afraid,”, Ch 5.1

- a. Physical assaults and verbal harassment against diaspora activists often occur during protests. A notable incident in 2022 involved the then Consul-General and his staff at the China consulate in Manchester, who were filmed dragging and assaulting a Hong Kong protester on the consulate grounds.¹¹
- b. Hong Kong activists have told Amnesty UK that some counter-protesters have been abusing the public power and complaint mechanism to disrupt their events in the UK, including anonymous complaints made to the venue manager during community cultural events requesting the removal of “politically sensitive” items containing protest messages.¹² In another instance, at a pro-Hong Kong protest in the UK, the police were called by Chinese individuals to the scene and asked the protest organisers to stop playing recordings relating to police violence in Hong Kong.¹³
- c. It is exceedingly difficult for individuals to identify and prove whether these incidents are perpetrated or endorsed by a government and its agents, which therefore requires thorough investigation. However, the police often fail to follow up on these instances.

11. Surveillance during on-site and online events, doxing, trolling and intimidation of activists on social media

Reports of instances of surveillance and harassment before, during and after protests;

- a. Protesters being photographed without consent by hostile individuals who shared the images on Chinese social media platforms, including Xiaohongshu, WeChat or Weibo, which are closely monitored by Chinese National Security Force.¹⁴
- b. Protesters being trolled online, including receiving death threats and facing accusations of violating the Hong Kong NSL, but also threats of them being reported to the police.¹⁵ To protect one's personal identity and work affiliation, people avoid following their colleagues on social media.¹⁶
- c. After joining protests or posting political comments on social media, family members of protesters were contacted by Chinese officials, raising suspicions that overseas protests and online activities on international social media platforms were being monitored with the aim to identify protesters and pressure them into halting their activities.¹⁷
- d. Hong Kong activists have received warnings on Facebook that their protest in the UK was “targeted by far-right groups”. In another incident, on the social media platform X, a community centre for Hongkongers was accused of “hiding illegal immigrants” and the address of emergency accommodation for Hong Kong asylum seekers was leaked

¹¹ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), p.36

¹² AIUK, “Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK” (previously cited), p.2

¹³ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), p.36

¹⁴ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), p.32

¹⁵ AIUK, “Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK” (previously cited), p.3

¹⁶ AIUK, “Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK” (previously cited), p.3

¹⁷ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), p.31

and shared online in far-right groups.¹⁸ Individuals involved with the incidents stated that they suspected involvement of the Chinese government, or pro-Chinese individuals.

- e. Community service and emergency support groups faced threats and harassment, including suspicious phone calls to a helpline from a number linked to the Hong Kong police. An organisation hosting cultural events received dubious sign-ups with contact details tied to the Hong Kong Police Force or the Hong Kong National Security Department.¹⁹ Organisers had to conduct thorough vetting to prevent the event details from being shared with the Hong Kong authorities. However, despite the extra due diligence, it does not fully eliminate concerns about potential data leaks and the risk of surveillance.

12. Harassment or punishment of family, relatives and beneficiaries in their home country

a. After national security warrants were issued to exiled Hong Kong activists, their family members, friends and colleagues in Hong Kong have reportedly been taken to the police station to “assist investigations”.²⁰ Friends of a prominent Hong Kong advocate were questioned by the authorities upon returning to Hong Kong after visiting the UK for leisure. They were asked whether they had met with the advocate and know about the advocate’s activities in the UK.²¹

b. UK-based Hong Kong diaspora groups report that those still in Hong Kong are increasingly cautious about connecting with overseas organizations due to fears of surveillance from local authorities. Individuals imprisoned for protesting in 2019 and 2020 are also sometimes questioned by prison officers regarding overseas financial support for their families, facing potential solitary confinement as punishment if such support is discovered.²²

c. The court has issued orders to confiscate the assets of exiled activists held in the accounts of their family members who are still in Hong Kong²³ Exiled Hong Kong activists on the bounty list are also denied access to their own bank accounts (including HSBC and Hang Seng Bank).²⁴

d. Described as “proxy punishment” or “coercion-by-proxy”,²⁵ the families of overseas students involved in political or human rights activities are known to be targeted by the Chinese authorities, from local police to national security officers and even Communist

¹⁸ AIUK, “Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK” (previously cited), p.3

¹⁹ AIUK, “Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK” (previously cited), p.2

²⁰ Hong Kong Free Press Hong Kong Free Press, “Hong Kong nat. security police take in 3rd relative of wanted activist Carmen Lau to assist investigation”, 17 February 2025, <https://hongkongfp.com/2025/02/17/hong-kong-nat-security-police-take-in-3rd-relative-of-wanted-activist-carmen-lau-to-assist-investigation/>

²¹ AIUK, “Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK” (previously cited), p.4.

²² AIUK, “Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK” (previously cited), p.3

²³ Hong Kong Free Press, “Hong Kong condemns ‘unfounded smear’ after wanted ex-lawmaker Ted Hui slams HK\$800,000 assets seizure”, 18 February 2025 <https://hongkongfp.com/2025/02/18/hong-kong-condemns-unfounded-smears-after-wanted-ex-lawmaker-ted-hui-slams-hk800000-assets-seizure/>

²⁴ According to the information provided by two wanted Hong Kong activists to AIUK.

²⁵ Dana M. Moss and others, “Going after the family: Transnational Repression and the Proxy Punishment of Middle Eastern Diasporas”, 2022, Global Networks, Volume 22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12372>, pp. 735–751; Fiona B. Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas, “At Home and Abroad: Coercion-By-Proxy as a Tool Of Transnational Repression”, 2020, Freedom House Special Report, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/home-and-abroad-coercion-proxy-tool-transnational-repression>.

Party officials.²⁶ The officials call and pay visits to the students' China-based families and even summon them to the police stations. The police has also pressured or instructed students' China-based family members to cut off funding for their children to coerce them into silence.²⁷

e. In addition to the stigma of being questioned by state authorities, the families of overseas students have received threats by government officials with direct and specific consequences related to the students' activities overseas. These include threats of family members' having their passports revoked; threats from being fired from their jobs; having promotions blocked, retirement benefits or education opportunities blocked; or limit their physical freedom such as making it difficult for them to travel abroad.²⁸

f. Chinese students' overseas and their activities can be subject to extraterritorial monitoring by state authorities. This phenomenon also aligns with reported incidents from marginalized diaspora communities such as Tibetans and Uyghurs, as well as reports of incidents from human rights activists living abroad.²⁹

13. Freedom of expression and academic freedom on campus scrutinised

a. According to a participant at Amnesty UK's roundtable, censorship of political messages was conducted by a university with respect to on-campus activity, including rejecting the presentation of materials with political messages due to their "sensitive" nature.³⁰ The testimonies were aligned with public news reporting in recent years, alleging that that teachers or lecturers in colleges were forced to leave the post because of their critical comments on Chinese social issues.

b. Students from China often feel intimidated to ask questions at academic conferences on sensitive topics like issues relating to the Uyghur community.³¹ They avoid expressing opinions on political issues and censor themselves due to fears of being reported to Chinese authorities, which limits their free expression and engagement in classroom settings, both in-person and online.³²

c. Lack of awareness of transnational repression in universities and colleges hosting students from Hong Kong and mainland China often leads to failure to mitigate the risks and provide support for targeted students. Expectations by professors of student participation overlook the genuine and well-founded fears of students facing risks of state-directed retaliation for comments made in the classroom and may expose students and their family members to additional risks.²⁸

²⁶ AI, "On My Campus, I am Afraid" (previously cited), p.28

²⁷ AI, "On My Campus, I am Afraid" (previously cited), p.29.

²⁸ AI, "On My Campus, I am Afraid" (previously cited), p.29 - 30

²⁹ AI, "On My Campus, I am Afraid" (previously cited), p.29 - 30

³⁰ AIUK, "Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK" (previously cited), p.3

³¹ AIUK, "Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK" (previously cited), p.3

³² AI, "On My Campus, I am Afraid" (previously cited), p.16-17

d. Such a repressive atmosphere has influenced students' academic focus, leading them to avoid studying political or human rights issues related to China due to potential retaliation.³³

14. Self-isolation, mental pressure and other chilling effects

- a. The fear of repercussions for comments made while studying overseas has significantly degraded trust among Chinese international students to speak on specific topics even in informal settings and outside the classroom. Students self-censor when in the presence of other students from China to avoid the possibility of having their statements recorded or reported to state authorities in China.³⁴
- b. Besides in their interactions with other students, some individuals have shared with Amnesty International their experience of self-censorship in conversations with family members and close friends back in China due to the fear of online surveillance by Chinese authorities on the platforms they used to communicate. These fears are not always understood by peers in their new home country, with the sense of feeling cut off from friends and family at home sometimes leading to self-isolation for overseas students.³⁵
- c. For students experiencing harassment by Chinese authorities, it can also lead to other diaspora members wanting to avoid “trouble by association”, which can exacerbate the harms of transnational repression by isolating people further from their communities, proactively cutting off contact with loved ones to protect them from being targeted by the Chinese authorities.³⁶
- d. Some of the threats mentioned above may not directly amount to transnational repression but contribute to a chilling effect impacting the entire diaspora community. It fuels self-censorship, mistrust and a strong sense of insecurity, eventually silencing dissent voices and leading to further violations of human rights.

Government response

What steps has the Government taken to address transnational repression in the UK? What departments have been involved in these steps? How effective is coordination between departments?

15. The UK government currently contextualises transnational repression as a form of “state threats” and approaches its policy responses through a national security lens, resorting to measures in the National Security Act 2023.³⁷ In November 2022, the UK government established the Defending Democracy Taskforce, which was meant to work across government with Parliament to review the UK’s approach to foreign interference and transnational repression. It is, however, unclear to the public what recent works have been undertaken by

³³ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), p.18

³⁴ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), p.19-20

³⁵ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), p.19-20

³⁶ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), p.19-20

³⁷ Home Office, Cabinet Office and The Rt Hon Tom Tugendhat MBE VR MP, “Ministerial Taskforce meets to tackle state threats to UK democracy”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ministerial-taskforce-meets-to-tackle-state-threats-to-uk-democracy>

the Taskforce, as Minister of State for Home Affairs answered in January 2025, the Taskforce is still “reviewing existing response to transnational repression”.³⁸

16. Framing transnational repression as “state threats” may help generate political momentum, but it fails to fully capture its nature as a human rights violation with socio-psychological impact on the affected communities. It emphasises law enforcement and intelligence service, while disregarding the positive roles various government departments can take including those responsible for immigration and asylum, support for victims of crime, community service, mental health and psychological support, and education. A human rights-centred approach necessarily enables a more holistic response to better meet the needs of the individual targeted by transnational repression.
17. A major problem with the existing multi-departmental response to transnational repression in the UK is the lack of transparency and accountability and the significant disparities in understanding and commitment between departments and officials. Members of public and NGOs are uncertain about which department or official to approach for support, making complaints, and sharing intelligence regarding transnational repression. The specific roles and responsibilities of various departments and frontline agencies remain ambiguous, and progress along with internal policymaking is often withheld from public scrutiny.
18. The Home Office, with support from the FCDO and other departments, leads the government's efforts on transnational repression. However, it is still challenging for civil society actors to establish effective and regular communications with relevant departments and ministers. Engagement often depends on the pre-existing working relations with specific desk offices or officers, and the level of responsiveness varies considerably. Staff rotations and changes in government can also lead to the loss of established relationships, institutional memory, and shifts in government priorities and political momentum. These inconsistencies increase the difficulty for civil society to meaningfully contribute to government policies on transnational repression.
19. As a comparative case study for inter-departmental coordination, the USA at the federal level, established an interagency working group on transnational repression established in 2021, with leads from National Security Council, Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).³⁹ The working group coordinates agency efforts, but is mainly reactive to individual cases rather than developing a structural response. The FBI currently has a dedicated workstream on transnational repression, which includes outreach programmes aiming at building relationship with the affected communities, education of law enforcers to mitigate risks and attacks, and a Threat Intimidation Guide translated into over 60 languages to help raise awareness and provide advice to victims of transnational repression.⁴⁰ The

³⁸ UK Parliament, “Question for Home Office: Defending Democracy Taskforce”, UIN HL4067, tabled on 14 January 2025, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2025-01-14/HL4067>

³⁹ US Government Accountability Office, “HUMAN RIGHTS: Agency Actions Needed to Address Harassment of Dissidents and Other Tactics of Transnational Repression in the U.S.”, p.8-9. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106183.pdf>

⁴⁰ The Federal Bureau of Investigation, “FBI Threat Intimidation Guide”, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/threat-intimidation-guide#Who-should%20I%20contact%20if%20I%20experience%20threats%20or%20intimidation:%20local%20police%20or%20the%20FBI>

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) also provides checklists and tools for the public to assess and mitigate certain risks of transnational repression.⁴¹

20. *We urge the UK government make clear to the public the specific roles and responsibilities of departments and frontline agencies in response to transnational repression. Relevant departments and their officials should maintain close communication and collaboration with the affected communities and NGOs on an overarching national strategy and best practices. They should also formalise such engagements and ensure a good flow of information across departments.*
21. *The government also needs to track, document, and publicise incidents and patterns of transnational repression incidents on UK soil regularly. The information would help civil society actors monitor the situation and develop their own risk assessments and mitigation plans based on credible official data.*

What international legal obligations does the UK have in relation to transnational repression? Are there further steps, including legislative, that the UK should take to give effect to those obligations?

22. When states target overseas dissidents, human rights defenders and students, a wide range of individuals' rights protected under the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) might be infringed, among others:
 - The right to liberty and security of person, free from arbitrary arrest, detention, and deprivation of their liberty (ICCPR, Article 9)
 - Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, correspondence, and attacks upon reputation (ICCPR, Article 17)
 - Freedom of opinion and expression, including to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers (ICCPR, Article 19)
 - Freedom of peaceful assembly and association (ICCPR, Article 21 & 22)
 - The right to take part in cultural life (ICESCR, Article 15)
23. Although the primary responsibility for transnational repression lies with the state actors that commit and direct these acts, the UK as the host country to the largest Hong Kong diaspora community in the world and a popular destination of international students, has ratified both the ICCPR and ICESCR and thus bears obligations under international human rights law to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction.

⁴¹ The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, "CISA Resources Applicable To Counter Transnational Repression", 20 September 2023
https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/CISA_Resources_Applicable_to_Counter_Transnational_Repression_v3_508.pdf

24. *The government must ensure accountability for the violations and abuses committed by the perpetrators. It has the duty to investigate, prevent and end the rights violations, by prosecuting those that amount to criminal act and providing victims an access to effective remedy and reparation promptly, effectively and thoroughly.*

C. Law enforcement and support for victims

How effective are the police at recognising and dealing with instances of transnational repression? Is a consistent approach offered by different police forces across the UK?

25. There is a general lack of awareness, appropriate training, and consistency in the way UK police deal with incidents of transnational repression and what the response looks like across the UK. Amnesty International UK spoke to high-profile activists that are wanted by the Hong Kong government and have had bounties placed on them. The level of support they receive from the police varies significantly but overall is unsatisfactory.⁴² An activist emailed the police after reports in the media identified him to be a target of surveillance in an alleged spying case, only to be advised to call 999. Police offered them no protection, advice or further support. Another activist, currently under the protection of the Metropolitan Police, noted frontline police officers often fail to recognise an isolated incident of harassment and assault as part of the state-organised or endorsed systematic transnational repression.
26. While the police are more reactive to highly aggressive forms of transnational repression that involve severe bodily harm and extreme threats to personal and public safety, punishable by the domestic criminal law, they are ill-equipped to identify and react to the more subtle, indirect and online forms of repression, including coercion by proxy (intimidation and harassment of target's family members at home), doxing, online harassment, stalking, surveillance and infiltration of state agents into overseas activist networks.
27. Amnesty International UK has documented how mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students in the UK have been photographed by suspicious persons who appeared to be monitoring protests. There are concerns that publicly identifying them could lead to harassment of their families, doxing and exacerbates the climate of fear. In the UK, no law prohibits individuals from taking photographs of others in public. As a result, in most cases police officers cannot help and will not intervene.
28. When diplomatic personnel engage in hostile acts, diplomatic immunity can significantly hinder police investigations and prosecutions. In 2022, after diplomats at China's consulate in Manchester assaulted a Hong Kong protester within the consulate grounds, six alleged Chinese officials managed to leave the UK before the government-imposed deadline for waiving their diplomatic immunity. Due to their protected status, the police were unable to question them, allowing them to evade investigation and any legal consequences. These failures to hold perpetrators accountable undermine the confidence and trust of diaspora communities in the police and the UK government.
29. When clashes arise between protesters and pro-government counter-protesters, police officers responsible for maintaining order on-site often dismiss the harassments and

⁴² AIUK, "Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK" (previously cited), p.5

verbal abuse from counter-protesters as mere ‘internal conflicts’ or “temporary disruption” between opposing political groups. UK law enforcement generally lacks an understanding of the political and ideological differences between the Hong Kong diaspora and people from mainland China, often assuming they belong to the same ethnic group. They may resort to pacifying tactics to de-escalate the clashes, which inadvertently compromise the free expression of diaspora protesters. For example, during a pro-Hong Kong protest in 2022, a group of Chinese individuals called the UK police, who then instructed the protest organisers to stop playing recordings of the “831 incident” which documented arbitrary police violence.⁴³

How effective is the support and security assistance offered to (a) individuals and (b) communities that are the targets of transnational repression? What guidance is provided to victims and how is it tailored depending on the state perpetrating the attack.

30. The UK government currently lacks a dedicated reporting mechanism, helpline or online platform where victims of transnational repression, their families, witnesses and NGOs can safely report cases and access support. Support for diaspora communities affected by transnational repression is extremely inadequate, fragmented and ad hoc.
31. While diaspora activists who have established relationships with the local councils and Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) are more informed and supported, the effectiveness of such support still depends on the awareness and commitment of individual staff members. Many concerned individuals struggle to find reliable and accessible information about how to mitigate and report the threats of transnational repression, with MPs of their constituency offering minimal guidance such as advising victims to photograph perpetrators and report to the police.⁴⁴
32. Some activists are also hesitant to share their lived experience and provide intelligence to government departments and MPs as they lack confidence in how UK institutions are managing digital security.⁴⁵ The parliament, FCDO and the Electoral Commission are not immune from Chinese and Russian state-affiliated cyberattacks.⁴⁶
33. *We call for the government to establish a dedicated hotline and an integrated information platform to handle reports and complaints related to transnational repression. The communities susceptible to transnational repression need an accessible contact point — in languages that affected individuals can comfortably read, write and speak — where they can access professional support and government resources.*
34. *The government should also provide education and training to frontline agencies and civil servants who may encounter survivors of transnational repression or their families, ensuring they possess the knowledge, skills, and sensitivity to manage these complex and sensitive situations.*

⁴³ AI, “On My Campus, I am Afraid” (previously cited), P. 36.

⁴⁴ AIUK, “Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK” (previously cited), p.5

⁴⁵ AIUK, “Roundtable on Transnational Repression in the UK” (previously cited), p.5

⁴⁶ Press Release, GOV.UK, “UK holds China state-affiliated organisations and individuals responsible for malicious cyber activity”
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-holds-china-state-affiliated-organisations-and-individuals-responsible-for-malicious-cyber-activity>

