

# Amnesty International UK

# MEDIA BRIEFING

## GLASGOW 2014: HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES

- Daily briefings on Commonwealth Countries available from 23 July
- Amnesty spokesperson available throughout the Games

**“Sport can be a real force for good in the world, but so often basic human rights are overlooked in the quest for sporting glory. We saw it earlier this year in Sochi when the rights of the gay community were trampled, and again in Brazil during the World Cup with the police using brutality as a method of crowd control. Serious violations of workers’ rights are continuing in Qatar as they build venues to host the 2022 World Cup – this situation that must be addressed urgently.”**

***Siobhan Reardon – Programme Director, Amnesty International Scotland***

The 20<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Games commence on Wednesday 23 July and runs until the 3 August 2014. During the Games, 6,500 athletes and officials from 71 nations and territories will have the opportunity to compete in 17 sports over 11 days.

The Scottish Government is one of three principal partners supporting the Organising Committee, [Glasgow 2014](#), in the delivery of the Games. The other partners are Glasgow City Council and Commonwealth Games Scotland, the lead body for Commonwealth Sport in Scotland. The Scottish Government is the major funder of the Games – contributing 80 percent of the net public cost – and is also ultimately accountable to the Scottish Parliament and the people of Scotland for the event.<sup>1</sup>

**“The Scottish Government is committed to creating a modern, inclusive Scotland which protects, respects and realises the human rights of all. We believe there is no place for prejudice or discrimination, in Scotland, or any other part of the world.”**

***Shona Robison, Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport***  
***Opening Address – Responsibility and Rights: The Glasgow Commonwealth Games<sup>2</sup>***  
***22 October 2013***

As we have seen in recent years, major international sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games, the World Cup and the Olympics are about more than the sporting excellence they showcase. The global scrutiny of both the event and the host nation has increasingly focused on human rights abuses; either in the host country, in participating nations, or those which are brought about by the event itself.

Anti-World Cup protests in Brazil in the run-up to the tournament, and during the competition, were violently repressed by police who used stun grenades, tear gas, and rubber bullets, and beat protesters with hand-held batons. In addition, tens of thousands of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/06/6891/1>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ihrb.org/pdf/reports/2013-10-22-Glasgow-Commonwealth-Games.pdf>

people were forcibly evicted from their homes to make way for development of infrastructure for the World Cup, and the 2016 Olympics in Rio.

In 2018, the World Cup will be hosted by Russia. During the Winter Olympics in Sochi this February, a clampdown on freedom of expression had serious implications. Campaigners highlighting the environmental impact of the Games were locked up on spurious charges. There was also international condemnation of new anti-gay laws enacted before the Games.

Qatar is still scheduled to host the 2022 World Cup. Amnesty has documented the horrendous situation faced by migrant workers from South Asia – the ones building the roads, hotels and stadia needed for the tournament<sup>3</sup>. They frequently have their passports taken on arrival and not returned, and have their wages withheld. They are forced to live in squalid, overcrowded accommodation, and work in extremely dangerous conditions. According to a report from the Qatari government, one migrant worker a day has died in the last two years<sup>4</sup>.

Large-scale sporting events can, however, be a significant opportunity to promote human rights. Amnesty International welcomed the development of a [human rights policy](#)<sup>5</sup> by the Glasgow Commonwealth Games Organising Committee – the first in over 80 years of Commonwealth Games history. We hope that this recognition of sport's ability to promote and protect human rights will be reflected throughout this year's Games, as well as future sporting events.

**Amnesty International is calling on the Scottish Government to ensure that it delivers on its commitment of a Commonwealth Games that promotes and upholds human rights, using its status as the host nation to condemn human rights abuses wherever they occur across The Commonwealth.**

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/qatar-fifa-must-not-tolerate-human-rights-abuses-construction-projects-2022-world-cup>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/14/qatar-admits-deaths-in-migrant-workers>

<sup>5</sup> <http://downloads.glasgow2014.com/sites/default/files/documents/Glasgow%202014%20-%20approach%20to%20human%20rights%20-%20December%202013.pdf>

## Beyond the playing fields

All major sporting events are accountable for protection of human rights and tackling human rights abuses on two fronts: through international human rights laws and treaties applicable to the country hosting the event<sup>6</sup>, and through business and human rights obligations<sup>7</sup> of the organisation responsible for the event.

This includes the rights of workers involved in the construction of infrastructure for an event, in supplying goods, equipment and merchandise related to the event, and of any other workers or citizens whose rights may be violated as a direct consequence of the event.

The most relevant international standards for countries and sporting bodies with regard to labour rights are the Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), these address:

- Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining
- The elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour
- The effective abolition of child labour
- The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation

**As well as the above commitments to labour laws, the wider impact on local communities and businesses of hosting major sporting events need to be taken into account. Commitments to respect human rights, in addition to Human Rights Impact Assessments, should be a requirement of all sporting bodies and a key part of the planning and bidding process for major sporting events.**

These should address the following activities and impacts:

- Use of land and displacement of people
- Construction of facilities and infrastructure
- Procurement of goods and services
- Use of agency workers
- Security arrangements
- Sponsorship
- The right to protest
- Child labour
- Human trafficking
- Violence against women
- Discrimination

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<sup>6</sup> The UN identifies nine core international human rights treaties. The UK is a party to seven of these, having signed and ratified the following:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Additionally, the UK (and subsequently Scotland through the Scotland Act 1998) is bound by the Human Rights Act which incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights.

<sup>7</sup> The UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights are based on a respect, protect and enable redress if human rights abuses have occurred.

[http://www.unglobalcompact.org/issues/human\\_rights/the\\_un\\_srsq\\_and\\_the\\_un\\_global\\_compact.html](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/issues/human_rights/the_un_srsq_and_the_un_global_compact.html)

All sporting bodies, including the Commonwealth Games Federation, have a responsibility to eradicate discrimination and they should take the action necessary to do so.

The relevant international standards that should be considered include:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Listed below are examples of human rights abuses that have occurred either as a direct result of a major sporting event taking place, or that have been exacerbated by the event.

### **Beijing Olympics 2008**

- Forced evictions to make way for construction of venues and facilities
- Repression of right to protest during the Games
- Arrest of political dissidents to avoid exposure during the Games
- Torture and mistreatment of protestors
- Press censorship and denial of freedom of expression

Source: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/what-human-rights-legacy-beijing-olympics-20080401>

### **South Africa World Cup 2010**

- Forced evictions and arbitrary arrests
- Abuses of power and use of violence by police
- Ill treatment and extortion by police and government officials
- Xenophobic attacks, particularly against Somali and Ethiopian nationals working in South Africa

Source: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/human-rights-concerns-south-africa-during-world-cup-2010-06-04>

### **Delhi Commonwealth Games 2010**

- Forced eviction of over 400,000 vulnerable people
- Use of excessive force and arbitrary detention by the police
- Violation of labour laws and use of child labour
- Increase in sex slavery and trafficking
- Alleged racism against African athletes

Source: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA20/029/2010/en/1d68af6f-d074-416e-8da5-b2f83b0c2f03/asa200292010en.html>

### **Brazil/Rio de Janeiro World Cup 2014/Olympics 2016**

- Forced evictions and demolition of favelas – displacing 250,000 people
- Increase in police violence and illegal use of weapons
- Arbitrary and indefinite detention of protestors
- Lack of accountability for police and officials actions

Source: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/brazil-protests-world-cup-rio-2014>

## **Bahrain Grand Prix**

- Lack of accountability over deaths at previous Grand Prix events
- Use of the event as justification for police crackdowns
- Arbitrary detention of protestors and use of torture
- Heavy-handed responses to peaceful protests

Source: <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/bahrain-warning-crackdown-during-grand-prix-weekend>

## **Qatar World Cup 2022**

- Serious violations of migrant workers' rights amounting to forced labour
- Workers' passports removed, wages withheld
- Workers forced to live in squalid accommodation
- Extremely unsafe working conditions, leading to numerous deaths

Source: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE22/010/2013/en>

## **The Commonwealth and Human Rights**

The Commonwealth is an intergovernmental organisation of 53 member states which were mostly territories of the former British Empire. The Commonwealth operates by intergovernmental consensus of the member states, organised through the Commonwealth Secretariat<sup>8</sup>, and non-governmental organisations, organised through the Commonwealth Foundation<sup>9</sup>. The Head of the Commonwealth, presently Queen Elizabeth II, is Sovereign of 15 Commonwealth realms in addition to the UK.

The Commonwealth is home to two billion citizens<sup>10</sup> from some of the world's largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries. Member countries come from six regions: Africa (18); Asia (8); the Americas (3); the Caribbean (10); Europe (3); and the South Pacific (11).

Most recent members include the following: Rwanda admitted at the 2009 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM); Cameroon; and Mozambique, the first country to join with no historical or administrative association to the Commonwealth<sup>11</sup>.

Leaders of member countries shape Commonwealth policies and priorities. Every two years, they meet to discuss issues affecting The Commonwealth and the wider world at the [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting \(CHOGM\)](#).

Kamlesh Sharma is the current Commonwealth Secretary-General, responsible for representing The Commonwealth publicly and for the management of the [Commonwealth Secretariat](#).

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa is the current Commonwealth [Chair-in-Office](#).

Rajapaksa was appointed for the two-year term at the last CHOGM meeting in the country's capital, Colombo, in November 2013. In advance of this appointment, 191,000 Amnesty

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<sup>8</sup> <http://thecommonwealth.org/organisation/commonwealth-secretariat>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://thecommonwealth.org/about-us>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.chogm2013.lk/index.php/chogm-2013/commonwealth/>

supporters globally called on the Commonwealth to publicly condemn Sri Lanka's human rights abuses<sup>12</sup>.

The decision to allow the gathering to go ahead in Colombo, despite legal advice<sup>13</sup> and evidence of major human rights violations committed at the end of Sri Lanka's civil war is hugely contentious. Both India and Canada boycotted<sup>14</sup> the gathering, with Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, accusing Kamallesh Sharma of "*acting as a shill [a stooge] for the Sri Lankan leadership, defending their every mistake*"<sup>15</sup>.

This is not the first time that The Commonwealth, as a governing body, has come under fire for not providing more leadership on human rights, one of the values that underpins [The Commonwealth Charter](#). The Charter sets out the values and aspirations to which all Commonwealth countries are supposed to abide by – democracy, human rights and the rule of law<sup>16</sup>.

41 of the 53 member nations – over 70 % – have anti-gay law legislation. However, there has been no condemnation of these laws by The Commonwealth, and the issue was not on the agenda at the last CHOGM meeting, despite pressure from many Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) groups.

[The Royal Commonwealth Society](#) drew attention to Uganda, Sri Lanka and The Gambia in its critical 'Commonwealth Conversation' report published in 2010<sup>17</sup>. The report said: "Leadership of the Commonwealth has become far more intently focused on keeping (the then) 54 governments happy and on maintaining the status quo than it has on remaining true to the Commonwealth's principles."

Furthermore, the Commonwealth Secretariat's Eminent Persons Group (EPG)<sup>18</sup>, recommended a Commonwealth Commissioner for Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights, but this post has yet to be established.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>[http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/33293/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+AmnestyInternationalAustraliaNews+Amnesty+International+Australia+News](http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/33293/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+AmnestyInternationalAustraliaNews+Amnesty+International+Australia+News)

<sup>13</sup> Kamallesh Sharma, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth accused of withholding crucial legal advice that could have prevented Sri Lanka from hosting the imminent heads of government meeting. The legal opinion said that the firing of the Sri Lankan chief justice by President Mahindra Rajapaksa was a contravention of the [Commonwealth Charter](#), which sets out the supposed shared values of the member states: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/canada/10365752/Canadian-PM-to-boycott-Commonwealth-summit-over-Sri-Lankas-human-rights-record.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/08/commonwealth-chief-stooge-sri-lanka-claims-canada>

<sup>16</sup> *THE COMMONWEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS: Priorities from Colombo to Valletta* The Royal Commonwealth Society. <https://thercs.org/assets/Research-/Human-Rights-in-the-Commonwealth.pdf> This report summarises an event that was organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society on the 24th of March 2014.

<sup>17</sup> <https://thercs.org/assets/Research-/Commonwealth-Conversation-Final-Report.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> The Eminent Persons Group (EPG)<sup>18</sup> was established by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their summit in November 2009

<sup>19</sup> At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Perth in 2011, the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) recommended the appointment of a Commissioner for Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights. By the end of 2012, the Heads had approved various EPG recommendations but the recommendation relating to the creation of a Commissioner was dropped since no consensus could be reached.' [http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/publications/nl/paper\\_series\\_2014/CHRI-Series%20on%20CW%20Mechanisms-CMAG.pdf](http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/publications/nl/paper_series_2014/CHRI-Series%20on%20CW%20Mechanisms-CMAG.pdf)

Amnesty International believes that The Commonwealth has great potential to advance human rights, create positive change, and put into practice the words of The Commonwealth Charter. However, much more needs to be done to turn these words into action.

As part of Amnesty International's global [Stop Torture](#) campaign<sup>20</sup>, we are calling on governments around the world to put in place effective safeguards against torture. The Commonwealth is uniquely placed to promote and facilitate these safeguards, through Commonwealth parliamentary and lawyers associations, as well as the sharing of best practice amongst police forces.

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<sup>20</sup> As part of Amnesty International's global stop torture campaign, we are calling for effective, independent mechanisms for investigating and prosecuting torturers are essential. These must be backed up by the political will to bring in necessary reforms to laws and institutions, maintain permanent vigilance, combat discrimination and act on every torture case. <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/Stop-Torture>