

By Email

18 September 2020

The Rt Hon Dominic Raab, MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs  
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

Dear Foreign Secretary,

I write to submit my resignation as the United Kingdom's Special Envoy on Media Freedom.

When the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (as it then was) asked me to serve as Special Envoy on Media Freedom, the role was described as one in which I would assist the UK in championing the right to a free press around the world. My role was intended to help promote action that governments could take to ensure that existing international obligations relating to media freedom are enforced in accordance with international law. I accepted the role because I believe in the importance of the cause, and appreciate the significant role that the UK has played and can continue to play in promoting the international legal order.

In these circumstances I have been dismayed to learn that the government intends to pass legislation – the Internal Market Bill - which would, by the government's own admission, 'break international law' if enacted.<sup>1</sup> I was also concerned to note the position taken by the Government that although it is an 'established principle of international law that a state is obliged to discharge its treaty obligations in good faith', the UK's 'Parliament is sovereign as a matter of domestic law and can pass legislation which is in breach of the UK's Treaty obligations'.<sup>2</sup>

Although the government has suggested that the violation of international law would be 'specific and limited', it is lamentable for the UK to be speaking of its intention to violate an international treaty signed by the Prime Minister less than a year ago. Out of respect for the professional working relationship I have developed with you and your senior colleagues working on human rights, I deferred writing this letter until I had had a chance to discuss this matter with you directly. But having now done so and received no assurance that any change of position is imminent, I have no alternative but to resign from my position.

---

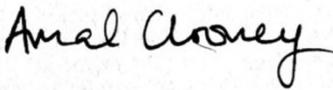
<sup>1</sup> Hansard, [8 September 2020](#), vol 679, col 509.

<sup>2</sup> HM Government, [HMG Legal Position: UKIM Bill and Northern Ireland Protocol](#), 10 September 2020.

I am disappointed to have to do so because I have always been proud of the UK's reputation as a champion of the international legal order, and of the culture of fair play for which it is known. However, very sadly, it has now become untenable for me, as Special Envoy, to urge other states to respect and enforce international obligations while the UK declares that it does not intend to do so itself. As the President of the Bar Council of England and Wales has affirmed, undermining the rule of law that 'this country is built on ... will fatally puncture people's faith in our justice system'.<sup>3</sup> And it threatens to embolden autocratic regimes that violate international law with devastating consequences all over the world.

Foreign Secretary, I strongly believe in the importance of the media freedom campaign that the UK and Canada are leading, and I commend you on your role in spearheading the creation of a UK human rights sanctions regime that furthers its goals. I believe the UK can be a tremendous force for good. But for the reasons outlined above, I am no longer prepared to serve as the government's Envoy at this time. A statement relating to my functions on the High-Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom is annexed to this letter.

Sincerely,



Amal Clooney

---

<sup>3</sup> The Bar Council, ['Bar Council Responds to the Government's Intention to Break International Law'](#), 9 September 2020. See also The Law Society, [Rule of Law Defines Who We Are and Underpins Our Place in the World](#), 15 September 2020.

## Annex



Human Rights  
Institute

25 years promoting and protecting  
human rights worldwide

# INTERNATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE

## NEWS RELEASE

[For immediate release: Friday 18 September 2020]

### **STATEMENT BY LORD NEUBERGER OF ABBOTSBURY AND BARONESS HELENA KENNEDY QC IN SUPPORT OF AMAL CLOONEY'S RESIGNATION AS UK SPECIAL ENVOY ON MEDIA FREEDOM**

---

**The High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom** is an independent body that was convened at the request of the UK and Canadian governments. The Panel comprises a diverse group of lawyers, academics and judges from around the world with expertise in international human rights law. The Chair of the Panel is Lord Neuberger, former President of the UK Supreme Court. Panel members have been selected and appointed by him. The Deputy Chair is Amal Clooney. **The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute acts as Secretariat to the Panel.**

The Panel's mandate is to (1) propose initiatives that can be taken by governments to ensure existing international obligations relating to media freedom are upheld, (2) to disseminate elements for model legislation to promote and protect a vibrant free press, and (3) to report on means of raising the cost to those who target journalists for their work.

**Lord Neuberger of Abbotsbury**, Chair of the High-Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, has stated that:

*“I agree with what Ms Clooney says in her letter of 18 September to the Foreign Secretary. I support her principled response to the shameful attitude of the UK government to its international treaty obligations in the Internal Markets Bill and in ministerial announcements that it is prepared to break international law. Ms Clooney’s deputy chairmanship of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom is quite distinct from her role as the UK’s Media Freedom Envoy, and I look forward to continuing to work with her and the other distinguished members of the Panel in carrying out its important functions. Journalists who are persecuted, imprisoned and even murdered for their work deserve all the help that they can get, including through legal reforms by governments that follow the Panel’s advice. It is in the interest of freedom of expression and the rule of law that they get such help”.*

**Baroness Helena Kennedy QC**, Director of the International Bar Association Human Rights Institute, Secretariat to the High-Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, has stated that:

*“I fully endorse the statements made in Ms Clooney’s letter of resignation and respect her decision to stand down as Envoy while maintaining her role on the Panel. Members of the Panel are appointed on an unpaid basis as a result of their relevant expertise and the Panel should complete its current mandate”.*

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to the Editor**

- (1) The **International Bar Association** (IBA), *the global voice of the legal profession*, is the foremost organisation for international legal practitioners, bar associations and law societies. Established in 1947, shortly after the creation of the **United Nations**, it was born out of the conviction that an organisation made up of the world’s bar associations could contribute to global stability and peace through the administration of justice.
- (2) The **International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute** (IBAHRI), an autonomous and financially independent entity, works to promote, protect and enforce human rights under a just rule of law, and to preserve the independence of the judiciary and the legal profession worldwide.
- (3) Follow the IBAHRI on Twitter here: [twitter.com/IBAHRI](https://twitter.com/IBAHRI)

**For further information, please contact:**

**Romana St. Matthew - Daniel**  
**Press Office**  
**International Bar Association**  
4th Floor, 10 St Bride Street,  
London EC4A 4AD,  
United Kingdom

Mobile: +44 (0)7940 731 915  
Direct Line: +44 (0)20 7842 0094  
Main Office: +44 (0)20 7842 0090  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7842 0091

Email: [romana.daniel@int-bar.org](mailto:romana.daniel@int-bar.org)  
Website: [www.ibanet.org](http://www.ibanet.org)

**IBA website page link for this news release:**

**Short link:**

**Full link**