Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Today’s resolution is about ensuring the horrors of 21 August never happen again

2013-09-27

Mr President,

The 21 August chemical weapons attack in Ghouta was horrific in its nature and its scale. The UN Secretary-General has rightly described it as a war crime.

So it is welcome that the Security Council has recognised the appalling nature of the act and has come together to agree a serious and far-reaching response.

We have done so today in adopting the first Security Council resolution on Syria in 17 months and I pay particular tribute to my colleagues Secretary Kerry And Foreign Minister Lavrov for all they have done to make this possible. And it is a groundbreaking resolution.

First, it recognises that any use of chemical weapons is a threat to international peace and security. This establishes an important international norm, which is essential in the wake of the Syrian regime’s appalling actions on 21 August.

It upholds the principle of accountability for this proven use of chemical weapons.

It imposes legally binding and enforceable obligations on the Syrian regime to comply with the OPCW decision adopted earlier this evening.

It makes clear that this Council shall impose measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter if there is non-compliance.

And it endorses the Geneva communiqué of June 2012.

We should be in no doubt about the challenges ahead in implementing this resolution. But if properly implemented – and this Council must ensure that it is – it will prevent a repeat of the atrocities committed on 21 August, or any other use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The United Kingdom will play its full part in this. I can today announce that the UK is making an initial contribution of $3 million to the OPCW Syria Trust Fund. I echo their Executive Council’s call today that all States in a position to do so should provide voluntary contributions and expertise to achieve what will be a challenging but vital task.

Let us not forget that Council action today has come only after two and a half years of unchecked brutality and well over 100,000 dead and millions displaced. The failure of the Council to tackle the crimes committed on a daily basis, has resulted in a culture of impunity in which a brutal regime believed it could get away with murdering its own men, women and children.

So it is vital that the Council now builds on the consensus we have reached today to make progress today towards a sustainable resolution of the crisis. With renewed purpose and resolve, we need to achieve a political transition, and that is why I welcome the fact that we have, as the Secretary-General said earlier, agreed among the Permanent Members of the Security Council to aim for a mid-November date for the start of Geneva II.

This will be a difficult process involving tough choices and compromises. But, crucially, we are all committed to making our best collective effort to make it work.

The goal is something on which we all agree – a negotiated transition in Syria, starting with the formation of a transitional governing body with full executive powers formed on the basis of mutual consent.

But no political process can deliver results immediately. Until it does, we must also make a greater effort on the humanitarian crisis. The scale of suffering is truly horrific: 100,000 dead, millions displaced. The United Kingdom has provided a total of $800 million to the humanitarian response so far, but we are yet to reach those inside Syria. For this we need genuine progress on humanitarian access.

So we believe that in the next few days the Council must agree to apply its weight and authority to securing unfettered and immediate access to those in need in Syria.

Mr President,

Today’s resolution is about ensuring that the horrors of 21 August can never happen again. The immediate need now is to focus on the everyday horrors of the dire humanitarian situation. And we need to redouble our determination to work through the Geneva II process, to end the conflict and secure a better future for Syria.

Thank you, Mr President.

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