Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

'While we must all take steps to tackle extremism overseas, we cannot lose focus of our domestic responsibilities.'

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Mr President,

I would like to thank the Secretary-General and yourself for convening this important meeting today.

Tolerance is the cornerstone of all peaceful, inclusive societies. It is integral to reconciliation and is ingrained in the Charter and the work of the United Nations.

Violent extremist groups – whether ISIL, Al Qaida, Al Shabaab or others - are a direct challenge to us all. Their barbarism knows no limits. They oppress free expression and violently subjugate women. They execute innocent people because of their different beliefs or sexuality. These groups threaten our shared values and destabilise international peace and security.

I will focus my statement on two points today; first, the steps we can all take to help tolerance and reconciliation take root in countries threatened by extremism, and second the actions we can take at home to reduce the risk to our communities.

Mr President,

History shows that governments that only govern for some of their people foster resentment and breed intolerance. And that the failure to meet people’s aspirations creates a breeding ground where extremist ideologies can take root. The rise of ISIL in Syria is a direct consequence of Assad’s brutal governance.

Too often people in the region have been faced with a false choice between an unrepresentative, ineffective, but repressive government on the one hand and a brutal insurgency on the other. Religion is co-opted, twisted and misused as a rallying call. To combat this we can do three things.

First, we can reclaim religion from those who seek to exploit it. Respected moderate voices can undermine the extremists’ poisonous ideology. The challenge is not in attacking the self-defeating narrative of extremists, but in making sure that moderate voices are accessible to

young and vulnerable people. Political leaders cannot do this on their own. It requires respected religious leaders, especially those with influence on young people, to speak out clearly and consistently with the message “not in my religion’s name”. So I welcome the participation in tomorrow’s event of so many distinguished religious leaders.

Second, we can help countries to build effective and inclusive national institutions. This will take time and it will take financial support. But sharing equal economic and political opportunity will help remove the perceived injustices exploited by extremists to recruit the vulnerable. The United Kingdom will play its part in this. We are proud to have fulfilled our promise to spend 0.7% of our gross national income on overseas aid to tackle poverty and inequality; we are the only G20 country to do this.

And thirdly, we can ensure that women play a full and active role in political institutions, peace processes and in reconciliation efforts. To marginalise half the population is to ignore their needs and undermine the sustainability of our efforts against extremism. As the Security Council heard last week, women often suffer most at the hands of violent extremists. Sexual violence has become a tactic of terror for ISIL and Boko Haram. In this fifteenth anniversary of resolution 1325, we must make every effort to ensure that women are central to our efforts to tackle extremism.

Mr President,

The United Kingdom takes pride in our multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. But we recognise that the call of extremism is not confined to overseas. Our communities are also at risk. And too many young British men and women have heard that call, and chosen to join ISIL in Syria.

So while we must all take steps to tackle extremism overseas, we cannot lose focus of our domestic responsibilities. We believe in addressing the whole spectrum of extremism; whether non-violent or violent, cultural or ideological, Islamist or neo-Nazi. That is why my government has founded an Extremism Analysis Unit to assess the different drivers of extremism, both domestic and overseas, to inform our policy choices in the future.

Alongside this work, we believe in promoting a set of positive British values that define who we are and what we stand for. Values that respect a citizen’s freedom and equality, whatever their faith or belief, whatever their sexuality or gender. Values that recognise that respect for the freedom of others is just as important as respect for one’s own. These values can help us challenge misconceptions that the West is at war with Islam. And they can help marginalise the voices of extremists and amplify the voices of reason.

Mr President,

As this will be my last statement in the General Assembly, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you very well for the reminder of your tenure as President of the General Assembly, and to thank all Members for their support and co-operation over the last five years.

I thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/while-we-must-all-take-steps-to-tackle-extremism-overseas-we-cannot-lose-focus-of-our-domestic-responsibilities