Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"We had a chance today to help those people, to stop the bombing, to let aid in. We have once again failed, but we must keep trying until we succeed."

2016-12-05

Thank you Mr President.

Just five days ago, I sat in this Chamber and asked ‘what will it take’ to stop the horror in Aleppo. Today Russia and its small number of followers have shown that they have no interest, none whatsoever, in answering that question.

Instead, for the sixth time in five years they have chosen to block meaningful action and hold this Council to ransom. In doing so, and much more tragically, they have also held to ransom the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children currently enduring hell in Aleppo.

They will claim that we made them veto. That there wasn’t enough time for proper consultations, that we forced them to a vote for political reasons. These are hackneyed excuses. This resolution was first circulated over a month ago. And yet, for most of that time, Russia simply refused to engage, more content to support Asad’s onslaught against Aleppo than to negotiate with fellow members of the Security Council.

Let me pay tribute to the work of Egypt, New Zealand and Spain in seeking consensus on such a sensitive issue. They left no stone unturned, reaching out in particular to the Russian delegation. They put their first draft into blue a week ago. They amended it to take account of Russian views, and they put their final version into blue on Friday. And that is the version in blue that we have in front of us, dated the 2nd of December. So I urge all delegations to avoid hiding behind hypocritical, bogus procedural arguments.

China’s veto is particularly surprising. Despite repeated pronouncements against politicisation and in favour of dialogue, China has decided to side with Russia, a party to this conflict.

Put simply, they [Russia and China] have chosen to veto, not because of a lack of consultation, but because of their longstanding, misplaced faith in a despot who has killed nearly half a million of his own people. Who has sanctioned the murder of civilians as they flee the bombed out ruins of Aleppo. A despot who would rather reduce Syria to rubble than to negotiate an overdue peace.

I could go on, but instead, let me ask Russia another question. What did you seek to achieve today?

For the past seventy one years, this Council has been responsible for maintaining international peace and security. Each and every one of us in this Chamber has committed to uphold that responsibility.

And yet through its veto today, Russia has once again blocked meaningful, credible action; action that could have fulfilled our collective responsibility. How does that veto serve international peace and security? How is it in keeping with the principles that we are all here to uphold?

Russia claims it is fighting terrorism and that its veto today is in pursuit of ridding Syria of extremists. That is pure fantasy. Blocking a seven day ceasefire, a ceasefire that would have let aid in, that would have fed starving children, that's not fighting terrorism. Continuing the indiscriminate bombing of civilians and attacking medical facilities, that's not fighting terrorism. Supporting a regime that uses chemical weapons, that carries out war crimes, that's not fighting terrorism.

Russia will claim that its intent is decent, humanitarian even. But this misses the point. Many Council members have pledged generous amounts. The UK has allocated $900 million. But we all know that this money counts for so little when humanitarian aid cannot even get in. And we all know who is obstructing the UN and its humanitarian partners. We all know who is using starve or surrender tactics, who is bombing civilians into submission.

Even if Russia will not use its influence to stop the bombing or permit humanitarian aid to be delivered, it is not too late for Russia and the regime to prevent even worse atrocities. Russia can still ensure the protection of civilians leaving eastern Aleppo. Russia can still enable the UN to protect those fleeing and allow the UN to have a role in planning evacuations.

The world and the Syrian people will not forget Russia's role in carrying out and in supporting the regime in carrying out such heinous crimes in Syria. Look again at the faces of those left, starving, bleeding, dying in Aleppo. They are not terrorists. Look again and change course. We had a chance today to help those people, to stop the bombing, to let aid in. We have once again failed, but we must keep trying until we succeed.

Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-had-a-chance-today-to-help-those-people-to-stop-the-bombing-to-let-aid-in-we-have-once-again-failed-but-we-must-keep-trying-until-we-succeed