Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Lord Ahmad welcomes conclusions of UN Human Rights Council

2017-06-23

Lord Ahmad said:

This has been the first Human Rights Council (HRC) session since my appointment as Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister responsible for the Commonwealth and the United Nations. The UK will continue to work tirelessly to ensure it holds those responsible for the worst atrocities and violations to account, and will work with the other members of the HRC to address the worst global crises of our time and seek to strengthen safeguards and protections for the future. We are grateful to the High Commissioner for Human Rights and his Office for their tireless efforts to promote and protect human rights around the world.

At this session the UK has, once again, played a leading role on a number of pressing human rights issues, including the situations in Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine and Eritrea. I am delighted that the Foreign Secretary's new Special Envoy for Gender Equality, Joanna Roper, was able to represent the UK at the annual full day discussion on women's rights, and I was also pleased to see the adoption of resolutions dedicated to the advancement of women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment.

The human rights situation in Syria remains acute, as carefully detailed by the Commission of Inquiry. Attacks on civilians, obstruction of humanitarian aid, and forced displacement of civilians continue, in particular by the Syrian regime. It is vital that the Human Rights Council continues to take a strong and unified stance on Syria. We therefore welcome the Resolution the Council has adopted and call upon all parties to ensure that the rights of all Syrian citizens are respected.

I welcome the resolution on the Democratic Republic of Congo which mandates the establishment of an international investigation into the violence in the Kasai region. The Council is right to be seriously concerned by serious human rights abuses and violations that continue to take place. It is important that an impartial investigation now takes place, to complement national efforts to determine responsibility for these dreadful acts. I trust that the authorities in DRC will grant the access to the investigation to ensure that those who bear responsibility will be brought to justice.

The UK welcomes the adoption of a renewed resolution on Ukraine. We remain seriously concerned by the human rights situation in eastern Ukraine and illegally annexed Crimea. It is crucial that this Council continues to discuss the detailed and objective reporting of the situation by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. This resolution will allow that to happen. I trust that the Russian de facto authorities will grant access to the High Commissioner and his Office so that they are able to undertake monitoring in illegally annexed Crimea, as called for in UN Resolution 71/205.

I thank the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea for her report to the Council. Of particular concern were the issues of indefinite national service and shortcomings in the rule of law, including widespread arbitrary detentions. I encourage the Eritrean Government to continue to build upon increased engagement with the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights and engage the international community more widely on progressing human rights issues. I also urge the government of Eritrea to fully implement its constitution, and deliver on its past commitment to work towards gender equality - ending Female Genital Mutilation and early and forced marriage.

The June session of the Human Rights Council traditionally has a strong focus on promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls, and - as demonstrated by the many and varied contributions to the full day session on women's rights. It is vital that all states continue to engage and work together if we are to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, including the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. This session's resolutions recognise the considerable discrimination that many women and girls continue to face and show how the international community must work together to tackle it. We must all continue work to eliminate violence against women and girls and end all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage.

The Joint Statement expressing concern over democracy, governance and human rights in Maldives was an important step. I urge the Government of Maldives to engage constructively with the international community and to take steps that clearly demonstrate its commitment to freedom of assembly and expression, an independent judiciary and the protection of human rights defenders. The UK, and the other governments that signed the joint statement, stand ready to help.

Migration remains one of the great challenges of our time. We recognise the positive contribution of migrants and at the same time reaffirm the rights of states to manage their borders. We continue to believe that managing migration and security and meeting human rights obligations are not mutually exclusive aims, and that there are possibilities for exchanging best practice which will help develop human rights compliance globally and protect migrants and refugees.

This session also saw the first report from the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, whose work the UK strongly supports, and a report from the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children. The UK Government is committed to working together with international partners to eliminate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030, as set out in Sustainable Development Goal 8.7.

The Human Rights Council is a vital forum, enabling Member States to work together to support and uphold universal rights around the world. This session has, once again, displayed the importance of unity and solidarity in the face of adversity. Many of us have faced horrific terrorist attacks this year – with attacks in London, Manchester, Egypt, France, Belgium, Afghanistan and Iran in the last few weeks alone. Now, more than ever, we must all come together, regardless of faith, gender or race, and stand united against those who seek to divide us.

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