Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Baroness Anelay on UN Day 2014

2014-10-23

I am honoured to have been invited to speak to you all this evening, and I am particularly delighted to have the opportunity to join forces once again with the Kingdom of Morocco to discuss UN issues, as I did in Geneva during the September Human Rights Council.

Let me start by congratulating the UNA-UK on the publication of your foreign policy manifesto.

I applaud your efforts to promote a safer, fairer, and more sustainable world. As Minister for the UN, I am keen to learn from and work with you.

This Government shares passionately your aspiration that Britain should be a force for good in the world. And, I believe that over the last 4 years it has been.

In Somalia, where we have led the way mobilising international support for efforts to unite and rebuild the country after decades of division.

In tackling climate change; promoting fair trade, tax and transparency and in fighting for an end to the use of sexual violence in conflict.

And yes, in places like Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya - where problems undoubtedly remain and new threats have emerged, but where we continue to support those who want to live their lives with the freedoms and protections afforded by the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

In so many conflict regions, the erosion of human rights has been the first step towards instability. The UN Secretary General‘s Rights Up Front initiative is an important effort to ensure that the international community responds quickly and effectively to warning signs of this kind. Yet, developments on the ground – from Syria to Sri Lanka – tell us that much more can and must be done.

It is clear that we face some very significant challenges in protecting and promoting the human rights agenda. The issues can be highly divisive within the international community, with some accusing us of advancing a Western agenda. But, the UK won’t shy away from these challenges.

And, as FCO Minister responsible for the UK’s work at the UN and for human rights, I am proud that the UK has led the way in ensuring we live up to our obligations. Through our

membership of the Human Rights Council we have been tireless in our efforts to move us closer to a world where, in the words of the UN Convention, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”.

This year we mark the start of the First World War. We remember, more than ever, the tragic circumstances that led, first to the creation of the League of Nations and then, later, to the establishment of the United Nations itself.

Next year we celebrate the UN’s 70th Anniversary. For most of us – so I’m told – 70 is an age where we have more yesterdays than tomorrows. For the UN, it must be a moment of renewal and reform.

The world has changed. But the need for fundamental rights to be enshrined and protected and for nations and people to come together, and to work together, has not been diminished. If anything, the global nature of the challenges- and indeed the opportunities- we face demands that we cooperate even more closely than ever before.

Those who violate international standards of behaviour must be held accountable for their actions. That is why the UK continues to be a staunch supporter of the International Criminal Court’s work to tackle impunity for the worst atrocities including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

This time last month, the Prime Minister led the UK delegation to the 69th session of the UN General Assembly Ministerial week. This was the UN doing what it does best: providing a platform for Member States to discuss the great challenges of the day and to narrow their differences on ways to tackle them.

We saw international consensus on the need to tackle ISIL. In the General Assembly, Presidents from Obama to Rouhani, denounced ISIL and supported a strong international response – something Britain had championed over the summer; securing a resolution which condemns ISIL and the Al Nusrah Front and urges UN members to take action to choke off terrorist financing and recruitment.

We saw international consensus on the need to take action to end the appalling human suffering in Syria. Justine Greening co-hosted a Ministerial Event, where over $1 billion in new humanitarian and development funding was pledged to the Syrian people. Thanks to a resolution, co-sponsored by the UK, the UN will no longer have to wait for the consent of the Assad Regime before it can cross the country’s borders with vital, life saving aid supplies.

We saw international consensus on the need to tackle Ebola. UNSC resolution 2177 called for a heightened international response to the threat to human life, security and economy posed by Ebola. The UK has already committed to building six new Ebola Treatment

Facilities and has deployed 750 military personnel in Sierra Leone, while pledging $180 million in aid.

And we saw international consensus on the need for a global agreement on climate change.

The Secretary-General's Climate Summit on 23 September was attended by 125 Heads of Government and State from 163 countries and 800 leaders from business, finance and civil society: the largest ever gathering of world leaders on climate change. Constructive interventions by the US, China and other key partners helped build momentum for agreement in December 2015 on an ambitious and binding climate deal aiming to limit global temperature rise below 2°C on pre-industrial levels.

As the Prime Minister has said, "climate change is one of the most serious threats facing our world. And it is not just a threat to the environment. It is also a threat to our national security, to global security, to poverty eradication and to economic prosperity."

Next year is also the moment when we need to reach agreement on a new framework for international development cooperation. This is a personal priority for the Prime Minister and for me. The UN's efforts over the past 15 years, through the Millennium Development Goals, have seen countries across the world make significant advances in development. They have inspired a generation to focus on aid and development like never before.

We now need to finish the job by agreeing post-2015 development goals that are simple, inspiring and relevant to people around the world. In addition to critical issues such as health and education, the goals need to capture the crucial importance of other building blocks for development including good governance, peaceful societies and gender equality. I hope other Member States will join the UK in advancing a development agenda of this kind that speaks to the needs of a modern world.

It's clear that the year 2015 will be an important moment in global affairs. Let us make it a year for renewing our commitment in the UK to the UN and the principles on which it was founded. I look forward to working with you all in this crucial and vital endeavour.

Further information

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