Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Lord Ahmad welcomes conclusions of the 37th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

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As I mentioned in my

speech at the opening of the session

, this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and now, more than ever, is the time to stand up for human rights, protect and uphold the rights of individuals and promote equality and freedom. I am pleased to see that resolutions on Syria, Iran, DRPK, Burma, South Sudan, Libya and Georgia were adopted, as well as a

UK-led cross-regional statement on the Maldives

and an

urgent debate on Eastern Ghouta that was requested by the UK

. It is essential we work together with other Member States to hold the perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses to account.

I welcome the mandate renewals on Mali, DPRK, Iran, Burma, Syria, Human Rights and the Environment, The Right to Food, and Human Rights and Privacy. I also welcome the renewal of the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan. The Government of South Sudan must now establish the Hybrid Court, to ensure that those responsible for human rights violations are held to account.

The human rights situation in Syria has, if anything, worsened in recent months and the death toll continues to rise. I therefore welcome the resolution extending the mandate of the UN Commission of Inquiry. This, along with the urgent debate the UK called for earlier in the session, which adopted a resolution condemning the horrific

starvation siege and bombardment of Eastern Ghouta

conveyed a strong message of support and solidarity to all Syrians.

As we have seen recently, the Russian State has been more than willing to ignore the rules-based international system and deny the rights of its citizens. These events have led the UK

to focus our

item 4 statement

(human rights situations that require the Council's attention) largely on Russia. The UK welcomes expressions of support from the EU and others. The human rights situation in Russia remains of deep concern, particularly around freedoms of expression and assembly, freedom of religion or belief and LGBT rights. We welcome the Council's unity in condemning such violations and abuses.

I welcome the latest resolution on Libya, which underlines the need for greater accountability for those who commit human rights violations and abuses, including unlawful killings. We will continue to work with the Government of National Accord, the UN and other partners to implement the resolution and address these crimes.

I welcome the increased support for the resolution on access for the OHCHR and human rights mechanisms to the Georgian breakaway territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. I hope that this expression of international concern is heeded and access granted so that vital human rights protection work can be undertaken in these isolated regions.

I welcome the adoption of the resolution on Burma, extending the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and calling for the allocation of necessary resources to ensure the UN Fact Finding Mission can fulfil its mandate. We will continue to urge Burma to grant access to the Special Rapporteur and the Fact-Finding Mission and cooperate fully with their respective mandates, and to call upon the Burmese authorities and military to ensure the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of the refugees.

Turning to Iran, I would like to pay tribute to Ms. Asma Jahangir, an inspiration to human rights defenders around the world. Her courage and commitment will be sorely missed. In this spirit, I hope that Iran will work constructively with the new mandate holder when appointed and allow them access to the country.

I welcome the adoption of the resolution on terrorism and human rights, a merger of the separate resolutions traditionally led by Mexico and by Egypt on which we worked hard to balance condemnation of terrorism with the need for States, in their efforts to counter terrorism, to ensure respect for human rights.

The UK abstained on the Chinese resolution on 'mutually beneficial co-operation'. We believe that international cooperation plays an important role in promoting and protecting human rights, but it is important to hold perpetrators to account and to speak up when rights are being violated.

I welcome the resolution on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted by consensus and with the widest number of co-sponsors. The UK is playing an active part in the global push towards the provision of quality education and learning for girls, including the most marginalised and vulnerable. In line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, we will work with partners to achieve 12 years of quality education for all children by 2030 and continue to push for gender equality.

The UK has pledged £50 million over 5 years to tackle violence against children globally, including £10 million on a global programme to tackle child sexual exploitation in 17 countries. The UK's £35 million 5-year programme to end Female Genital Mutilation by 2030 is the largest contribution of any single country.

Defending religious freedom and promoting tolerance remains a priority for the UK government and we therefore welcome the adoption of both the EU's 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' resolution and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's text on combating religious intolerance resolution.

During the last week of this session we delivered a

statement to the Council to mark the International day of elimination of racial discrimination

. The Prime Minister has announced a

£90 million programme

to help tackle inequalities in youth unemployment highlighted by the

Race Disparity Audit

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Today, after 4 weeks of intense effort to protect and strengthen the promotion of human rights, the Council session draws to an end. The Human Rights Council is a vital forum, enabling Member States to work together to support and uphold universal rights around the world. In the face of adversity, we must continue to strive towards a world that stands unified in holding those that commit human rights violations and abuses to account.

Further information

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