Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

# Lord Ahmad welcomes conclusions of the 36th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

2017-09-29

The UN Human Rights Council concluded its 36th Session today with important resolutions on Burundi, Yemen, Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the death penalty. This session also saw the adoption of the UK's Universal Periodic Review, where we have been making good progress in important areas.

I am delighted to have attended the Council this session and to have reaffirmed the UK's strong commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. I had a positive first meeting with High Commissioner Zeid to discuss human rights priorities and had thep opportunity to meet members of the Syria Commission of Inquiry to set out our continued support to their work. I also met civil society and NGOs to discuss, amongst other topics, the plight of Rohingya muslims in Burma and the humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh. Protecting human rights and individual freedoms is a priority for this Government, for our Prime Minister, and for me personally. It is our collective responsibility, and we will continue to use our membership of the council to speak out about human rights violations and abuses around the world.

I am pleased to see that resolutions on Burundi, Syria, Yemen, DRC, have been adopted at this session, as well as a Council decision on Burma. It is essential we work together with other Member States to hold perpetrators to account.

Burma

The UK welcomes the adoption of a Council decision on Burma, extending the mandate of the Fact Finding Mission. Given the deeply concerning human rights situation across the country, including in Kachin, Shan and Rakhine States, its work is crucial. We once again urge Burma to grant the Mission access to the country, and to cooperate fully with its mandate. We also urge the security forces, under Commander in Chief Min Aung Hlaing, to stop the violence in Rakhine State, allow a rapid return for refugees, and support the swift implementation of the Annan Commission's recommendations by the civilian government.

Ukraine

The UK continues to see the regular report into, and the discussion of, the human rights situation in Ukraine as essential. We are deeply concerned by the continued high numbers of civilian casualties, detailed by OHCHR, and urge all parties to the conflict to work urgently to achieve a full and sustained ceasefire. We also welcome the thematic report into the human rights situation in illegally annexed Crimea which was undertaken despite the refusal of Russia de facto authorities to allow access to the High Commissioner and his Office, as called for in UN General Assembly Resolution 71/205. We reiterate our call for the de facto authorities to grant access to Crimea for international monitors.

Syria

The human rights situation in Syria remains deeply concerning. The horrific violations and abuses the Syrian people continue to face are carefully recorded by the Commission of Inquiry. Attacks on civilians, obstruction of humanitarian aid, and forced displacement of civilians continue to be carried out by the Syrian regime. It is vital that the Council maintains a strong and unified stance on Syria. An important part of our efforts must be to hold those responsible to account. We therefore welcome the Resolution the Council has adopted and call upon all parties to ensure that the rights of all Syrian citizens are upheld and respected.

Yemen

The deteriorating human rights situation in Yemen was an important priority at this council. We remain deeply concerned by the large scale human rights abuses that continue. We welcome the Council achieving consensus to establish a group of eminent international and regional experts as a concrete step taken by the international community to address the crisis and bring relief to innocent civilians.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The resolution on the Democratic Republic of Congo builds on the international investigation mandated at the last HRC into the violence in the Kasai region. The Council is right to be seriously concerned by heinous human rights abuses and violations that have taken place there. It is important that we have agreed to have a comprehensive OHCHR report on the human rights situation as well as enhanced dialogues through the HRC calendar year to make sure responsibility is determined. I trust that the authorities in DRC will grant the access to the investigation, mandated in June, to ensure that those who bear responsibility will be brought to justice.

Somalia

The UK welcomes the adoption by consensus of the renewed resolution on Somalia. The resolution acknowledges the progress Somalia has made in strengthening the protection of human rights, and the commitment of the Federal Government of Somalia to continuing this

progress. It is now vital that Somalia, together with support from the international community, takes forward the steps laid out in the resolution. This includes the establishment of the Human Rights Commission to end the culture of impunity and hold accountable those who commit human rights violations and abuses.

Sudan

I welcome the resolution that the Human Rights Council has adopted on Sudan. We are encouraged by the Government of Sudan's increased willingness to engage with the international community on human rights issues, including with the Independent Expert. However, regrettably, fundamental freedoms continue to be restricted across Sudan. I therefore welcome the unified stance that the Council has taken. We urge the Government to increase accountability for human rights violations, and to cooperate with the UN/AU Mission in Darfur to increase protection for civilians.

Burundi

The UK remains deeply concerned at the human rights situation in Burundi and is disappointed at the Burundi Government's response to the Commission of Inquiry's report, and in particular, their rejection of the report's conclusions that there were reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity had been committed. Our national statement outlined worrying reports that gunmen entered the office of the UN OHCHR in Bujumbura. The Government of Burundi has a duty to protect diplomatic staff and premises. To this end, I welcome the resolutions on Burundi, and urge the Burundi Government to engage with the international community to bring an end to the violence and to hold the perpetrators to account.

Central African Republic

The UK thanks the Independent Expert on CAR for her report to the Council and welcomes the extension of the mandate of the Independent Expert. The UK is concerned at the increase in human rights violations and abuses due to a resurgence of violence between armed groups. Reports of deliberate targeting of civilians by armed groups, in some cases based on ethnicity or religion is deeply troubling. The continued violence has seen significant numbers of displaced people who are without access to basic humanitarian needs. The UK urges the international community to provide essential assistance to the people of CAR to prevent the onset of a humanitarian crisis.

Modern Slavery

I spoke at the start of this session about the importance the UK places on tackling the crime of modern slavery and our Prime Minister's personal commitment and leadership to eradicating human trafficking, modern slavery, and forced labour. The newly published

“Global Estimates”

further highlight the enormous scale of the challenge.

At the UN General Assembly this month, I also had the honour to speak at a

“Why Slavery?”

event, launching a campaign to raise awareness of modern slavery. Tackling modern slavery requires the concerted effort of us all but government leadership is crucial. The UK’s

Call to Action

, launched at an event chaired by our Prime Minister and UN Secretary General Guterres on 19 September, has been endorsed by 37 countries and we will continue to work tirelessly to get more to sign up. I also encourage all governments to ratify the International Labour Organization’s protocol on forced labour and to work with us in supporting the

“50 for Freedom”

campaign. We will continue to work with the international community and use opportunities such as the UPR to press for further action on this critical agenda.

PSVI

At the UN General Assembly, together with Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten, I also launched the

Principles for Global Action

on preventing and addressing stigma affecting victims of sexual violence in conflict. The Principles for Global Action is a key tool for policymakers and practitioners and aims to provide a survivor-centred approach to working to end stigma associated with conflict-related sexual violence. This document incorporates the expertise of 13 UN Agencies, NGOs, civil society, academics, international organisations and donor countries. The guide was also informed by experiences of survivors and practitioners from 16 conflict affected countries, and is a truly global document to help tackle stigma worldwide.

UK Universal Period Review Adoption

In May this year the UK underwent its 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review. Last week, we set out our position on all 227 recommendations we received from Member States in May during the UPR dialogue. We also voluntarily committed to providing an update on up to 5 recommendations by May 2018, and an update on all recommendations via a Mid Term Report in 2019. We are clear that the UPR is not just a three and a half hour dialogue that

occurs for all States every four years. Each cycle builds on the last, with Mid Term Reports and other updates being an important way to demonstrate ongoing commitment to the UPR.

The Human Rights Council is a crucial platform, allowing Member States to support and uphold universal rights around the world. As an outward-looking, globally-minded, and inclusive country, the UK has always played an active role in the Council and other UN human rights fora. The UK will continue to promote universal human rights as a foundation for development and a vital tool for conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation.

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Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/lord-ahmad-welcomes-conclusions-of-the-36th-session-of-the-un-human-rights-council