Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Office Minister welcomes UN Human Rights Council session

2013-03-22

Foreign Office Minister, Baroness Warsi said:

Today the Human Rights Council (HRC) concluded another crucial session, and responded to some of the most pressing human rights situations in the world.

I welcome the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate systematic violations of human rights in North Korea. North Korea has one of the most appalling human rights records in the world and this decision demonstrates the international community's determination to hold them to account. I call upon the government to cooperate with the Commission, and allow it unhindered access to the country.

I also welcome the 12 month extension of the mandate for the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, which enables it to continue its critical work documenting human rights abuses and violations in the country. The evidence gathered will ensure that those responsible for human rights violations and abuses will be held to account.

The Council also took further steps to promote reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka and expressed concern over the ongoing human rights situation. I am pleased that this body sent a strong signal and called on the government to implement effectively the recommendations of its Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission and to conduct an independent and credible investigation into violations of international law.

I also welcome the Council's action in renewing the mandates of Special Rapporteurs who report on the human rights situations in Iran and in Burma.

We have publicly condemned, on many occasions, the shocking violations by the Iranian regime against its own citizens. The Special Rapporteur's continuing role is crucial to ensure that those inside Iran have a voice; and that the international community continues to receive the best possible information on activities about which the Iranian regime would prefer the world not to know.

In regards to Burma, we are deeply troubled by the recent outbreak of violence in Meiktila. We continue to be concerned by remaining political prisoners and ongoing ethnic conflict, especially in Kachin State, as well as the situation in Rakhine State. The resolution, adopted

by consensus, calls on the Burmese government to take all necessary action to address these serious challenges, and to uphold their commitment to open an Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Despite encouraging progress in Burma over the last 18 months, there is a clear need for ongoing monitoring by the HRC.

The Council also took an important step in promoting the protection of human rights in Mali. The establishment of an Independent UN Expert will be an essential tool for providing both assistance to the government and monitoring the human rights situation.

This session also maintained the international consensus on promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief, and combating all forms of intolerance. This is a personal priority and I believe that it is critical that the UN continues to have a united voice on such difficult and sensitive issues. Individual member states must now focus on translating the follow up resolution to 16/18 into practical actions on the ground. I am pleased that the Council has agreed to extend the mandate for the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief for another three years.

I was encouraged to see the first ever discussions on the death penalty at the Human Rights Council. The UK Government strongly supports the worldwide abolition of the death penalty. We believe that the death penalty undermines human dignity; that there is no conclusive evidence of its deterrent value; and that any miscarriage of justice leading to its imposition is irreversible and irreparable. It is right that this body plays a role in promoting global abolition of this practice and I look forward to further discussions at future Council sessions.

As we look ahead to our bid for election to the Human Rights Council (2014-2016), I will continue to support the work of the Council and work to ensure it responds appropriately to all violations of human rights, wherever they occur.

Further information

For statements on the UNHRC decisions on Syria and North Korea, see:

Foreign Secretary welcomes extension of UN mandate on Syria

UNHRC: Commission of Inquiry into human rights abuses in North Korea

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