Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Explanation of UNSC Syria vote by Ambassador Lyall Grant

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Following the UN Security Council vote on 4 February, Ambassador Lyall Grant, UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations, made the following statement:

Mr President,

The UK is appalled by the decision of Russia and China to block an otherwise consensus resolution submitted by Morocco, the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Germany, Portugal, Colombia, Togo, Libya, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Tunisia, Oman and Turkey.

It has been ten months since the Syrian people bravely demanded their universal rights. And ten months since the Syrian regime responded by violently repressing and killing its own people.

Six months ago, this Council adopted a Presidential Statement condemning the widespread violations of human rights and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities. It called for an immediate end to violence; compliance with obligations under international law; and for the Syrian government to implement its stated commitments to reform.

On that day, the death toll in Syria stood at approximately 1,000. But the Syrian regime only continued its brutal repression.

Four months ago, to the day, two Council members vetoed an attempt to send a clear message to the Syrian regime to end the bloodshed.

That day, the death toll stood at 3,000. And the Syrian regime only continued its brutal repression.

Mr President,

The death toll today stands at around 6,000. The Syrian regime has ferociously escalated its already brutal repression in the last 24 hours, subjecting the citizens of Homs to artillery and heavy weaponry. The death toll will be high. Those that blocked Council action today must

ask themselves how many more deaths they are prepared to tolerate before they support even modest and measured action?

Last Tuesday, this Council - and the world - heard from His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim of Qatar and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. They came with a simple request for Security Council support for the Arab League's plan to facilitate a political transition and bring about a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

The original Moroccan draft resolution did just that. It had, from the outset, support from the vast majority of Council members and had the backing of the Arab League. Yet some Council members argued that the resolution imposed regime change. It said no such thing. But in an attempt to reach consensus, we provided further assurances in the text.

The same minority argued that the text could somehow be used to authorise military intervention. It did no such thing - it was a Chapter VI resolution. But in an attempt to reach consensus, we provided further assurances in the text.

The same minority argued that very modest language expressing concern about weapons was somehow tantamount to an arms embargo. It was not. But we took it out.

They said that mere mention of the existence of Arab League sanctions was tantamount to sanctions. It was not. But we took it out in an effort to reach consensus.

Mr President,

The facts speak for themselves. There is nothing in this text that should have triggered a veto. We removed every possible excuse.

The reality is that Russia and China have today taken a choice: to turn their backs on the Arab world and to support tyranny rather than the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. They have failed in their responsibility as permanent members of the Security Council. And they have done so on the most shameful of days of the Syrian killing machine's 300 days of repression.

Mr. President, the UK will continue to support the Arab League's efforts to bring about a peaceful transition in Syria and will continue to support the brave Syrian people in their demands for change. The regime must cease the violence. There must now be a transition to a new political dispensation. Should the regime continue on its current trajectory, we will once again bring the issue back to the Council, in consultation with our colleagues in the Arab League.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/explanation-of-unsc-syria-vote-by-ambassador-lyall-grant