Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"This is Russia’s seventh veto on Syria in five years."

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Thank you Mr President.

I am appalled that Russia has vetoed this resolution today and I am surprised and disappointed that China has chosen to join them – at complete odds with the principles of non-proliferation that both China and Russia claim to support so strongly.

As permanent members of this Council and as Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Russia and China have a clear responsibility to take action against the use and proliferation of chemical weapons. By vetoing this resolution today, they have undermined the credibility of this Council and of the international rules preventing the use of these barbaric weapons.

In Security Council resolution 2118 we all agreed – Russia and China included – that any use of chemical weapons by anyone in the Syrian Arab Republic will lead to this Council imposing measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Thanks to those vetoes today, we have failed to do so.

This wasn’t a political text. It was a technical resolution in response to an impartial and factual report by the Security Council-mandated Joint UN-OPCW Investigative Mechanism. It was a report we all called for. It was an investigation we all supported.

But instead of backing the resolution, we have seen yet again that Russia is prepared to abuse its veto power to stand by a regime that has no regard for its own people. That has no regard for the most basic rules of war or international treaties; a regime that has indiscriminately bombed and besieged its own people. A regime that has turned chemical weapons on its own population, killing six year old children like Mohammed.

This is Russia’s seventh veto on Syria in five years. What further evidence do we need that Russia will always prioritise the Asad regime over the protection of the Syrian people? Well, today we have learnt that they will plunge to new depths; that they would rather cover up for Asad then prevent the further use and proliferation of chemical weapons.

The Russians will say this resolution is based on weak or flawed evidence. But the JIM was a fully independent UN mechanism which Russia created. Russia agreed the methodology the JIM would apply. And yet when they came up with an answer Russia didn’t like, all of a sudden, there’s a problem.

Russia's answer is that Syria should conduct its own investigation. The idea that the guilty party should investigate itself is absurd and it is clearly recorded that the JIM's investigation has been obstructed by the Syrian regime.

Russia will claim the JIM doesn't meet a legal standard of evidence. Well, it was never intended to. As we all agreed in SCR 2235 it was meant to examine the available evidence in an impartial manner and come to a conclusion.

Russia will claim that we should be focusing on Daesh's use of chemical weapons. But we already have robust and comprehensive measures in place to combat Daesh. The draft resolution would have reaffirmed our commitment to those measures and reiterated our condemnation of Daesh.

Russia will say that supporting this resolution will disrupt the Syrian political process. Well, this is simply not true. The United Kingdom remains committed to working with Russia, and everyone else, through the UN to help the Syrian people reach a lasting political settlement.

But not taking action against chemical weapons use undermines confidence in the international community's ability to tackle flagrant violations of international law. It undermines confidence and trust of ordinary Syrians affected by these horrific attacks. This is no way to build the right conditions for successful political talks.

Despite Russia and China's actions Mr President, I want to reiterate our thanks to the JIM for their work and to international partners who helped the JIM. Because of that tireless work, we know without doubt that the Asad regime and Daesh used toxic chemicals as weapons against civilians in Syria.

Those responsible for such attacks remain free and unpunished to this day. Today we had a chance to step up and begin to end that impunity. Instead, Russia and China have let down the people of Marea, the people of Talamenes, Sarmin and Qaminas, and the wider international community that seeks justice for those horrific attacks.

Without a clear response to these flagrant abuses of international law, the Asad regime is only going be emboldened to preserve its chemical weapons capabilities and to continue to use those chemical weapons. We should all be concerned by reports of further chemical weapons use in Syria, most recently in Aleppo and East Hama last year.

And in response to these vetoes, Daesh too will surely only be encouraged to continue using chemical weapons – something that Russia claims to oppose. And the longer term credibility and utility of the Chemical Weapons Convention will also suffer.

But the United Kingdom will not let Russia's actions today stop us from working with international partners to see justice for the victims, and to prevent the use of chemical

weapons by anyone, anywhere. This includes the international, impartial and independent mechanism on Syria agreed by the General Assembly last year. We must be able to demonstrate that the international system works, and that we are able to bring those responsible for using chemical weapons to account. Anything less is not an option.

Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/this-is-russias-seventh-veto-on-syria-in-five-years