Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Statement to Parliament on the G8 Foreign Minister's Meeting

2013-04-15

With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a Statement on the meeting of G8 Foreign Ministers in London last week, which also allows me to update the House on international events over the recess.

The theme of the meeting was preventing and resolving conflict and dealing with its consequences. There were important agreements in five areas which the UK had established as priorities.

The G8 agreed to support the reengagement of international financial institutions such as the IMF with Somalia, so it can invest in its economy, and welcomed the Somalia Conference which will be held in London on May 7th. The Ministers endorsed the Burmese government’s proposals for responsible investment to support political and economic progress, while urging peace and reconciliation to end ethnic and religious conflicts. On cyberspace, we agreed to share best practice and build up the capacity of other countries to secure their networks effectively. The UK’s G8 Presidency this year is being used to help create economic opportunities in countries in transition in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly for women and young people. The Ministers endorsed our programme to promote investment, support enterprise, and work with Arab Countries on the return of stolen assets. And the G8 agreed a landmark Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in conflict, which I will return to in more detail shortly.

We also had extensive talks on pressing international issues.

In Syria, we face worsening conflict and extreme humanitarian suffering. Well over 70,000 people have died, a truly horrific number. 5.5 million people are in desperate humanitarian need, and there are now 1.3 million refugees in neighbouring countries – a quarter of a million more than when I last spoke to the House only last month. The UK is deeply concerned that the UN relief effort is critically under-funded, and that only 34% of the $1.5 billion humanitarian appeal has so far been provided, even though the need will become far worse if the conflict continues. The G8 agreed immediate priorities of increasing humanitarian access inside Syria, ensuring that donors provide the funding they have promised, and the need to support stability in host countries.

G8 Ministers reaffirmed the view that the use of chemical weapons in Syria would demand a serious international response. The UK is increasingly concerned that there is evidence of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. These allegations must be fully and urgently investigated. We welcome the UN Secretary General's announcement of an investigation into the allegations, and call again on the Syrian regime to cooperate fully and allow the investigation unfettered access to all areas. They should take heed that the world is watching. Those who order the use of chemical weapons, or who participate in their use, must be held to account.

We also agreed that a Syrian-led political transition is urgently needed, based on the principles of the Geneva Communiqué. The opposition has stated it is open to dialogue and we are supporting their efforts to prepare for political transition. The Syrian government must demonstrate that it is ready to enter negotiations in good faith. We are calling on Russia to work with us to establish a genuine political effort on this basis.

I, along with my American and French counterparts, held talks with two Vice Presidents of the Syrian National Coalition and the newly appointed interim the Prime Minister and ahead of the G8. We discussed how the Coalition can best represent the interests of all Syria's communities and uphold human rights, and how we can work together to increase services and humanitarian assistance inside Syria.

The UK is determined to do more to support the Syrian National Coalition. Our aim is to bring about a political transition by building the credibility and capability of the moderate opposition and increasing pressure on the regime. The package of non-lethal assistance including protected vehicles and body armour that I announced in my last Statement, is about to be shipped to the region. As I said during my last Statement to the House, we have to be prepared to do even more to help save lives. Our policy on Syria cannot be static in the face of this growing calamity.

And as the Prime Minister said last month, we have taken no decision that we would like to send arms to the Syrian opposition. The UK and France have argued that we will need further amendments to the EU arms embargo, or even to lift it altogether. There is a case for greater flexibility if we decide urgent action is necessary, for example in response to a specific incident or continued grave deterioration on the ground, or to create the conditions for a successful political transition. I will discuss this with the Foreign Ministers of other key countries in the Friends of Syria Group in Istanbul on Saturday, with EU Foreign Ministers in Luxembourg next week, and in further international meetings next month.

The G8 Ministers also reviewed the threat to international security from North Korea. We condemned its aggressive rhetoric, the announcement it would reopen the nuclear facility at Yongbyon and its development of nuclear and ballistic missile programmes breaching its international obligations. We urged North Korea to engage in credible and authentic multilateral talks on de-nuclearisation, abide by its obligations under all relevant UN Security

Council Resolutions, abandon all of its weapons programmes and refrain from any further provocative acts. All G8 Ministers were clear that North Korea's current posture will only lead to further isolation. We emphasised our willingness to take further significant measures if North Korea conducts another missile launch or nuclear test. I discussed North Korea in detail with the Japanese Foreign Minister in the margins of the G8, and spoke to the South Korean Foreign Minister this morning. I also welcome Secretary Kerry's visit to the region at the weekend. I have laid a Written Ministerial Statement before the House today on these developments and the action the Government is taking.

The G8 also discussed recent E3+3 talks on Iran's nuclear programme, and the disappointing outcome. Tehran's position falls short of what is needed for a diplomatic breakthrough. We will continue with the twin track approach of sanctions and negotiations, but the G8 were clear that the window for diplomacy will not remain open forever.

We also had very good discussions on the Middle East Peace Process, strongly welcoming Secretary Kerry's recent visits to the region and the US commitment to finding a just, lasting and comprehensive peace there. Both sides must show bold political leadership, and refrain from actions that threaten the viability of a two-state solution.

I am delighted that the G8 Foreign Ministers agreed a major Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in conflict, the first of its kind and the result of a year of effort and negotiations by the United Kingdom. I pay tribute to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Sexual Violence Zainab Bangura, and to UN Special Envoy for Refugees Angelina Jolie, who has worked with me to develop this initiative since its beginning.

The G8 has declared - for the first time – that rape and serious sexual violence in conflict constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. G8 members have the responsibility to search for, prosecute or transfer for trial individuals accused of such crimes, regardless of their nationality, wherever they are in the world.

The G8 committed themselves to the development of a comprehensive International Protocol on the Investigation and Documentation of rape and sexual violence in conflict, to increase the number of successful prosecutions. The UK will now take the lead in developing this Protocol with experts from all over the world as a matter of urgency.

We declared that there should never be any amnesty for sexual violence in peace agreements, pledged to review the doctrine and training we provide to our own national military and police and to peacekeeping troops of other nations. The Declaration also includes vital commitments on women and children's rights, the protection of women human rights defenders. The G8 endorsed deployment of international experts to help build up the judicial, investigative and legal capacity of other countries, as the UK is already doing. Our

team of over 70 experts including doctors, forensic scientists, police and gender experts has already deployed to Bosnia, the Syria border and Libya, and will carry out further deployments this year to those three countries as well as South Sudan, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo. And the G8 announced £23 million pounds in new funding to back these efforts, including over £10 million from the United Kingdom.

This was a truly historic step, marking a wholly new international effort to shatter the myths about sexual violence in conflict and end the culture of impunity. We will now take this campaign to the United Nations. I will lead a debate at the UN Security Council during our Presidency in June, and it will be one of my top priorities for the UN General Assembly in September.

So in all these areas the G8 Foreign Ministers addressed the crises of today, but also – as I believe strongly we must always do – addressed ourselves to improving the condition of humanity.

Further information

Read the

G8 Foreign Ministers' joint statement

Read the

G8 Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

Read the

written statement on recent developments on North Korea

More information on the

Foreign Secretary's talks with Syrian opposition delegation

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-to-parliament-on-teh-g8-foreign-ministers-meeting