Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

“We must redouble our efforts to put an end to the violence in Syria”

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“Mr Vice President,

The United Kingdom thanks the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her briefing this morning. We welcome the vital role which she and her Office are playing to ensure that the international community is aware of the horrific atrocities being committed by Bashar al-Assad and his regime.

I align myself with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union. It is barely a week since the Security Council was blocked from taking action to support the Arab League’s efforts aimed at ending the brutality in Syria and facilitating a peaceful, Syrian-led political transition.

Emboldened by the Council’s failure to act, Assad and his regime have stepped up their campaign of violence and repression. They are indiscriminately using heavy artillery to bombard unarmed civilians in Homs, Hama, Zabadani and the outskirts of Damascus, in an effort to silence those who seek only to exercise their legitimate democratic rights.

Hundreds of people have been killed over the past few days, adding to the more than 6000 deaths reported to the Human Rights Council by the independent Commission of Inquiry in December. As the High Commissioner made clear, thousands of ordinary Syrians have been illegally detained, tortured and murdered in gross and systematic violations of human rights which almost certainly constitute crimes against humanity.

Assad’s promises to end the violence have repeatedly been shown to be nothing more than empty words aimed at buying time to continue crushing with brute and bloody force the aspirations of his people. The Syrian regime has brushed aside the strong condemnation of the Human Rights Council and of this Assembly. It has ignored the calls of the High Commissioner, and of the UN Secretary General. It has denied access to the independent international Commission of Inquiry set up in response to the deteriorating human rights situation. And it has failed to implement the League of Arab States’ Plan of Action, despite having agreeing to do so.

In the long term, Assad's strategy will fail. His crackdown will simply feed the cycle of violence in Syria, and increase the likelihood of descent into full-scale civil war. The international community must seek a rapid, peaceful resolution to prevent this terrible tragedy from unfolding further. There are those that argue that we must be patient, that we should allow time for Assad to implement reform. But in almost a year of lethal repression there has been no reform, only senseless murder, broken promises, transparent deceptions, and endless prevarication.

Mr Vice President,

We welcome the strong lead which the League of Arab States has taken in seeking a peaceful resolution to this crisis. We commend this weekend's statement by Arab League. We remain committed to supporting an Arab-led process to end the crisis in Syria in a way which avoids military intervention. We note the proposal in the Arab League's decision of 12 February to take forward a resolution in this Assembly. We support this initiative and urge all member states to do the same.

We welcome the announcement of the Friends of Syria group. We will work closely with the Arab League as it sets up this group. We hope the Group of Friends will focus international efforts to establish and oversee a process of political transition in Syria, in line with the Arab League's decisions of 22 January. As part of this, we hope it will be able to support the Syrian opposition to adopt a united position and become representative of all Syria's communities.

But these initiatives are not enough on their own. The people of Syria justifiably feel that the United Nations has shamefully abandoned their cause. We must, as individual member states and collectively, send them a clear signal that this is not the case. We must redouble our efforts to put an end to the violence in Syria. We must give our full support to the League of Arab States' efforts to ensure a peaceful process of transition. And we must demonstrate clearly that those who commit terrible atrocities will be held accountable for their actions.

Thank you".

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