Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Thanks to your actions today, Syrians will continue to lose their lives in Aleppo and beyond to Russian and Syrian bombing.

2016-10-08

Normally I begin my statements in this Council with the words ‘thank you, Mr President’. I cannot do that today.

Because today, we have seen the fifth veto in five years on Syria from you, Mr President. A veto that has once again stopped this Council from creating the unity needed to give the people of Syria any hope for respite from their suffering. A veto that has once again denigrated the credibility and respect of the Security Council in the eyes of the world. A veto that is a cynical abuse of the privileges and responsibilities of permanent membership, and I simply cannot thank you for that.

Nor can the thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women and children trapped in Aleppo. Tonight they will endure another night of fear, of pain, another night of wondering whether they will live to see the morning. A hundred thousand of them are children. The current tactics being used in Aleppo under the alibi of countering terrorism are turning a humanitarian crisis into a catastrophe.

Your veto today Mr President has only confirmed what we have known for so long. Russia’s actions in recent weeks have exposed just how hollow Russia’s commitment to the political process is. Today we have seen that commitment for what it really is; a sham.

Instead of investing energy in peace and diplomacy, you have instead supported, facilitated and cooperated with the Syrian regime to retake and destroy areas standing against Asad, killing off, literally, those who want a moderate, peaceful and pluralistic future, free from both Asad’s barbarism and the horrors inflicted by Daesh and other terrorists in Syria.

It is Syrian civilians who continue to bear the brunt of that cruelty and your complicity. Civilians, medics, White Helmets under direct attack from barrel bombs, cluster munitions and incendiary weapons. And that’s even before we mention the continued, barbaric use of chemical weapons by the regime.

I echo the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury who described the destruction of Aleppo as the absolute contempt for the human spirit, for the dignity of the human being.

This Council cannot stand by while such misery is meted out on the people of Aleppo. And yet, thanks to you, Mr President, that is exactly what we are doing.

This text that you vetoed was not unreasonable. It called for sensible, overdue steps that would have saved lives, starting with the complete end of the bombardment of Aleppo. There can be no military justification for aerial attacks that indiscriminately hit civilians, and their homes and their hospitals.

This text called for full and unhindered humanitarian access. It is despicable that the regime continues to refuse access to besieged and hard to reach areas. It is despicable that the violence is so extreme that the safety even of humanitarian convoys cannot be assured. As seen through the strike on a UN aid convoy last month, for which the evidence is clear that Russia was responsible.

And this text called for the full implementation of resolution 2268 and the resumption of the cessation of hostilities. We see every day in Aleppo that there simply can be no military victory in this conflict. There can only be losers. And we see every day that obligation after obligation set by resolution after resolution of this Council are being flouted. We need Council unity to end this war and that unity will only come when Russia changes its policy and stops the aerial bombardment.

This has been a strong week for Council unity, and yet we have ended it on sadly familiar ground. We – the whole Council - stood with you on Wednesday as you announced the next Secretary-General. Thanks to your actions today, Antonio Guterres's job will be even harder. And worse still, thanks to your actions today, Syrians will continue to lose their lives in Aleppo and beyond to Russian and Syrian bombing. Please stop now.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/thanks-to-your-actions-today-syrians-will-continue-to-lose-their-lives-in-aleppo-and-beyond-to-russian-and-syrian-bombing