Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Baroness Anelay welcomes progress at the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee

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The UN General Assembly’s Third Committee concluded its 71st Session today. Resolutions were adopted on Syria, Crimea, Iran, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the death penalty, whilst the mandate of the new UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity was successfully defended.

Foreign Office Minister Baroness Anelay said:

The United Nations General Assembly’s Third Committee is a crucial tool for the international community to address human rights concerns; passing resolutions on countries where violations and abuses of human rights are widespread, and on a range of thematic issues, including the death penalty. I strongly endorse the clear message sent by the Committee in its rejection of the attempt to prevent debate of country resolutions at this session.

Syria remains the world’s biggest humanitarian and security crisis. I welcome the adoption of the resolution on Syria and the increase in the number of states voting in support. This sends a clear, strong message from the international community to the Asad regime and its backers, and condemns the violence being waged against the Syrian people. This is a regime that has been accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the United Nations Human Rights Council’s Commission of Inquiry. The Asad regime has consistently undermined the efforts of the UN and thwarted the international community’s efforts to end the conflict. This resolution reaffirms that there must be no impunity for perpetrators of atrocities. Given the scale of the crimes, holding to account responsible parties will be essential for lasting peace and reconciliation.

I also welcome the Committee’s recognition of the dire deterioration in human rights in the Crimean peninsula since its illegal annexation by the Russian Federation in 2014. The call in the resolution for immediate, unfettered access to Crimea for all international human rights monitoring bodies is particularly important. It is clear that human rights standards are not being met in Crimea. Systematic obstruction and denial of access by the Russian de facto authorities mean it is the only part of Ukraine which is not covered by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Ukraine monitoring mission. The resolution highlights the international community’s concerns at the range of violations and abuses documented in Crimea, including the forced imposition of Russian nationality and the ongoing

human rights abuses being suffered by the Crimean Tatars. It also calls on Russia to address these concerns, and requests an independent report on the situation there.

I am very encouraged by the adoption of the resolution on human rights in Iran, with a historically high number of votes in support. Iran's human rights record remains deeply concerning, in particular Iran's frequent use of the death penalty, especially in cases which do not meet the minimum standards defined by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I hope that Iran will use the opportunity presented by this resolution to engage with the international community and to improve the rights and freedoms of all its citizens.

I welcome the resolution on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which was adopted by consensus this year. This reaffirms international concern at the appalling human rights situation, which shows no sign of improvement. As the resolution makes clear, it is shameful that resources are being diverted away from supporting the real needs of the North Korean people to fund their nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, also in breach of United Nations Security Council Resolutions. We continue to urge the DPRK to respect the rights of its citizens, end widespread human rights violations and engage substantively with the international community.

I welcome the increased vote count in the resolution in favour of a Moratorium on the use of the Death Penalty. It was encouraging to see a number of countries voting in support for the first time but disappointing to see others moving in a negative direction. The UK supports global abolition of the death penalty; as a first step to achieving that, we call for a moratorium in the use of this outdated, cruel, unfair and ineffective punishment.

I also very much welcome the outcome of the vote in favour of the amendment to the 'Report of the Human Rights Council' resolution. This preserves the mandate of the new UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) in the face of attempts to block it. It also sends a clear message that the international community must uphold the universality of human rights. The rights of LGB&T people are a legitimate concern of the UN and the international human rights framework should properly consider - and take steps to address - violence and discrimination against LGB&T communities. Much still needs to be done to build a bigger consensus for the work of the Independent Expert and on LGB&T rights. This will form one of my objectives during future visits to countries where these rights need strengthening. I am confident that the Independent Expert's work will bring real and practical benefits to the lives of LGB&T people. His work will shine a spotlight on violence and discrimination experienced by many people in all regions of the world. It will also provide recommendations to the international community on how to address this violence and discrimination. The UK offers its full support to the Independent Expert in his important work.

The attempt by a number of delegations to overturn the SOGI mandate also risked setting a dangerous precedent of undermining the Human Rights Council. The UN General Assembly

should not be used to unpick decisions that were made legitimately by the Council. I was saddened that such an attempt was made, but reassured that countries from all regions of the world demonstrated their support for the Council's independence by voting in favour. Given the important role of the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee in upholding and championing human rights, it is vital that we unite to ensure that the work of the HRC and UNGA goes forward with wide support and energy.

Finally, I was delighted that during the Third Committee session the UK was re-elected to the Human Rights Council for the 2017-19 term. The UK fully supports work to ensure that human rights are considered as an integral part of the UN system. We will continue to use our voice to help strengthen the Council, to support countries working to improve their human rights record and to hold to account nations that commit serious and systematic violations against their citizens.

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