Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

# End of session statement for UNGA 3rd Committee

2017-11-23

Lord Ahmad welcomes progress on human rights at the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, which concluded on Tuesday with important resolutions on Syria, Crimea, Iran, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Burma adopted.

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 sexual and reproductive health rights. The UK is firmly committed to ensuring that these words are turned into action.

Burma

The UK continues to raise the desperate plight and human suffering of the Rohingya in Burma. We are committed to working with international partners to resolve the situation in Rakhine. I welcome the OIC-led Resolution in the Third Committee, which the UK co-sponsored. I am delighted that this passed overwhelmingly on 16 November, with 135 States voting in favour, demonstrating the strength of feeling across the international community. I also welcome the UN Security Council's adoption of a Presidential Statement on 6 November; the first UNSC product on Burma for ten years. This is a significant step and has delivered a clear message to the Burmese authorities - international pressure will continue until those forced to flee can return in safety free from fear of persecution and attack.

Syria

I welcome the adoption of a resolution on Syria, where the conflict has now lasted longer than the Second World War, and an estimated over 400,000 people killed. This resolution sends a clear message from the international community to the Assad regime and its backers, and strongly condemns all human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law in Syria. The UN Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) has concluded that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons in four incidents, with tragic consequences. Those responsible must be held to account.

Crimea

I welcome the Committee's re-adoption of the Crimea Human Rights Resolution which draws attention to threats to human rights on the peninsula. Earlier this year the OHCHR released a thematic report on Crimea and Sevastopol, which laid bare the degradation of human rights standards in the peninsula since the Russian Federation illegally annexed it in 2014. Concerns include the forced imposition of Russian citizenship; retrospective application of laws to the period prior to 2014; arbitrary arrests and detentions; forced psychiatric confinement and illegal transfers to Russia of prisoners and pre-trial detainees. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Human Rights Monitoring Mission for Ukraine has been operating in Ukraine for two years, yet has been systematically refused access to Crimea. Restoring access to the Crimean peninsula for international human rights monitoring bodies remains key.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

I also welcome the resolution on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), again adopted by consensus. The international community is resolute in our condemnation of the North Korean regime's human rights abuses and its pursuit of its illegal nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. We continue to urge the DPRK to respect the rights of its citizens, end its widespread human rights violations and engage in good faith with the international community.

Iran

I am encouraged by the adoption of the resolution on human rights in Iran, which again passed with a high number of votes in favour, and which for the first time contains a reference to the detention of dual and foreign nationals. Iran's human rights record remains deeply concerning, but there have been some welcome improvements over recent months. In particular, the new law on drug related crime should dramatically reduce the numbers of those facing the death penalty. This is a small step in the right direction and I hope that Iran can build on this to eradicate the use of the death penalty completely.

I was particularly heartened to see positive language on comprehensive education on human rights, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health included in this year's Youth resolution, which was adopted by consensus. All individuals must have the right to make their own decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and well-being, and the provision of Comprehensive Sexuality Education to all throughout their life cycle is therefore essential. I was however saddened to see that we could not make similar progress on advancing the same language in the Girl Child resolution this year.

The UK will continue to speak out for those without a voice and to stand up for the universality of human rights, so that the resolutions agreed here can make a real difference.

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