Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

UK welcomes conclusions of UN General Assembly's Third Committee

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The

UN Third Committee

(Social, Humanitarian & Cultural issues) concluded its 68th Session with important resolutions on countries including Syria, Iran, Burma and DPRK, and on Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Foreign Office Minister Baroness Warsi said:

The UN 3rd Committee is an important forum for addressing human rights violations wherever they occur. At this session the Committee has once again taken action on Syria, and I am also encouraged that the Committee is maintaining effective pressure on Iran, Burma and DPRK and is responding to a range of other human rights issues, including the Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The UK welcomes the strong adoption of the Syria resolution, reflecting the worsening human rights situation in this brutal conflict. I particularly endorse the resolution's reference to the importance of the International Criminal Court and its condemnation of the regime's obstruction of humanitarian efforts. Furthermore, I am encouraged that it recognises that the evidence points strongly towards the Assad government's responsibility for the use of chemical weapons against its own people.

All of this illustrates the urgent need for a political solution to the conflict. That's why I fully support the resolution's endorsement of the Geneva II process, which represents the best chance for a political transition to a democratic, representative and peaceful Syria. I therefore welcome the recent announcement by the United Nations that the Geneva II process will start on 22nd January. The UK is intensifying work towards its success.

I welcome the adoption of the resolution on the human rights situation in Iran. This is the tenth consecutive year that the Third Committee has passed a resolution in support of human rights in Iran and is a clear statement by the international community that the situation in Iran remains unacceptable.

The resolution on the human rights situation in Burma was again agreed by consensus. This is a significant achievement which reflects the work done by our Government, the European Union and co-sponsoring countries to engage positively with the Burmese government. It recognises progress including the continued release of political prisoners, increased freedom of speech and national ethnic reconciliation.

We welcome the Third Committee's continued attention to the systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights in DPRK. The adopted resolution reiterates the call for DPRK to cooperate with the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights. We welcome the work of the UN Commission of Inquiry and look forward to their final report next year.

Promoting freedom of religion or belief and combating intolerance on the grounds of religion or belief remain key concerns of the United Kingdom and a personal priority for me. I am therefore pleased that the negotiating process around the two resolutions on this topic has been marked by a greater sense of common understanding of what is needed to tackle the rising tide of attacks on religious freedom. These two resolutions, both adopted by consensus, followed on from a second meeting of international leaders which I convened during Ministerial week at the UN General Assembly in September, focussed on what more politicians in particular can do to promote freedom of religion or belief and fight religious intolerance within our societies. The international community must build on our shared aim of combating religious intolerance, translating this into practical action to protect the human rights of minorities and promote pluralism in society. I gave a speech in Washington on 15 November stressing this point and the need for an international response to the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities.

The UK was pleased to join consensus on the resolution 'The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age'. The United Kingdom strongly supports the right to privacy and the right to freedom of expression.

Despite very challenging negotiations this year, the UK has made plain both our commitment to women's, child, and youth rights and our support for women human rights defenders.

As we look ahead to taking up our seat on the Human Rights Council for the term 2014-2016, I would like to emphasise the UK's own commitment to strengthen human rights, both domestically and internationally. We strive to be a powerful example of a country that upholds these rights, judging ourselves by the highest standards and taking corrective action where we fall short.

Further information

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