Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary on Syria: "Urgent for the Security Council to pass a meaningful and strong resolution"

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“Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening,

I think we have had a good discussion in the Security Council of this vital and pressing issue and I hope that by coming here today, my Foreign Minister colleagues, from several other countries, and I, have really helped to impress on the Security Council how seriously we take the urgency of the matter.

As I pointed out earlier in the Security Council, when the Presidential Statement on Syria was agreed in August about a 1,000 people had died, when the Security Council debated the draft Resolution that we and our European colleagues put forward in October about 3,000 people had died.

Now we think nearly 6,000 people have died in Syria in the most appalling repression and violence, and so in the United Kingdom we unequivocally support the work of the Arab League. I think they are to be congratulated and commended on this work, and for coming to the Security Council with their report today, which is a very powerful report.

We’ll continue to support that now as consideration continues of this draft resolution. We think it is urgent for the Security Council to pass a meaningful and strong resolution. And that is why with other nations we’ve put forward this resolution endorsing the plan of the Arab League and I hope the case that has been made so powerfully today will greatly reinforce the arguments for that. A few questions? Yes -

Q: The Russian Ambassador struck a more conciliatory tone than we’ve heard before. Do you see it that way and do you have hopes for …(indistinct)?

A: Well, of course I would like to see it that way. I think we will see over the coming hours, over the next day or so, whether that is the case. I certainly think the discussion at the Security Council illustrated the strength of the arguments for the Arab League plan and also illustrated that there were not many arguments against it and some of the nations that have had misgivings about passing such a resolution did not state very powerful arguments against it.

So I think the benefit of the argument went very clearly to those of us advocating the support for this resolution. Of course, we will hold discussions with Russia and other nations over the next 24 hours to see if we can make progress on this resolution. Yes, next question?

Q: Some critics argue that this draft Resolution may lead to a civil war and / or allow foreign countries to interfere with the internal affairs of Syria. Do you have any response to that?

A: Yes, I have heard it said that this could lead to a civil war. What do we have in Syria now, though? We have people dying every day. We have between 30 and a 100 people being killed violently, every day. We have the torture and abuse of huge numbers of people, including children. What the Arab League are putting forward is a plan for a peaceful resolution of this situation.

So that is the answer to those who think it could make the situation worse. This is a plan by the countries in the region for addressing this problem peacefully in a Syrian led political process and that is the answer to the other part of your question. This is not about foreign intervention in Syria. This is about the United Nations Security Council supporting a Syrian-led political process instigated by the countries of that region. Yes?

Q: In recent days we've heard some of the Permanent Representatives on the other side say that what's most objectionable to them is this idea that you would predetermine in advance that power would be transferred from Assad to his Vice-President. So I wondered, so they say that is predetermining the process, they call it regime change sometimes. Is that an absolute precondition, from your point of view, to solve the crisis?

A: Well, it's certainly our view. It's been our view for a long time that President Assad should go and has lost all credibility, not only internationally, but with his own people, so many of his own people as well. That is not what it says in this resolution which supports the Arab League plan and that calls on him to give the power to his deputy to conduct negotiations and discussions with all parties in Syria and so I think it was very clear in what the Prime Minister of Qatar said in presenting the position of the Arab League and what the Secretary-General of the Arab League said. They were very clear that that is what they are proposing and that is not regime change from the UN Security Council. Just time for one more question.

Q: Your position is for President Assad to step down. The Russian position is for them to hold onto the regime of Assad. How can you reconcile these positions given that the negotiations are rather stuck on this political transition? Where do you see hope for compromise or do you not see any?

A: Well, that way to reconcile that is to support the position of the Arab League. This is not western nations trying to impose their view. This is the countries of that region. The leaders of the Arab world putting forward a plan by which the Syrian people can decide on their own

future. And that is surely something that all Members of the United Nations should be able to support.

Thank you very much indeed.”

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