Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"Russia’s action will not stop us from working with our partners to find justice for the victims of chemical weapons."

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Thank you Mr President. A little over four years ago in this very chamber, a member of the Security Council proudly declared, and I quote, “The use of chemical weapons by anyone will have to be carefully investigated by the Security Council, which will stand ready to take action under Chapter 7 of the Charter.”

“By anyone.” Wise words indeed. Does anyone know who, four years ago, uttered those lines? Any guesses?

It was the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Today those words have lost all meaning. They ring hollow in this Chamber today, drowned out by Russia’s veto - its ninth on Syria in six years.

Today we should have been extending the investigation that Minister Lavrov called for; allowing the Joint Investigative Mechanism another year to conduct its vital work. Instead, because of Russia alone, that investigation is destined to come to a premature and unnecessary conclusion next month. Unless Russia changes its mind, as I hope it does, the JIM report on Khan Sheikhoun will be its last, despite the continuing evidence from the OPCW of other cases of chemical weapons use in Syria.

I’ve often expressed my disappointment at Russia’s actions on Syria in this Chamber. I’ve often expressed my frustration at their refusal to allow the Security Council to respond to the most heinous crimes committed in Syria.

But today, all I will ask is: Why?

Why has Russia alone stopped an investigation whose work is not yet complete?

Why has Russia brought an end to a mechanism that they initiated, and we all created and mandated, when there are still questions to answer about Sarin in Al Latiminah?

Russia called for the formation of the JIM, they negotiated its terms, they agreed its mission. And yet when faced with the prospect of the JIM revealing the truth, why has Russia alone chosen to shoot the messenger?

It seems that, not content with spuriously questioning the JIM's methods and conclusions, Russia has now sought to silence them. Instead of respecting the professional and impartial work of the JIM, whose tireless efforts I pay tribute to today, Russia alone has chosen to abuse its veto to support a regime that has no regard for international treaties, no regard for the most basic rules of war, no regard for its own people.

Mr President we have worked hard - together – to build the international norms and conventions that have long prevented the use of chemical weapons. For decades it seemed as though the international community had reduced these weapons to a historical footnote from the First World War; no longer used, no longer a part of a modern, humane society.

But now what kind of message does this veto send to those who might consider using such weapons? What kind of message does it send to groups like Daesh, the very groups that Russia says it is committed to defeating?

We've heard a lot about breaking the unity of the Security Council. Well it's not the eleven members of the Security Council who voted in favour of this resolution who are breaking the unity. It's not the eleven members of the Security Council who did not support the Russian procedural shenanigans this morning who are breaking the Security Council's unity. It is Russia, that is protecting the Syrian regime, that has broken the Security Council's unity.

The United Kingdom cannot, and will not, let Russia's actions today erode the norms that we have worked so hard to create. Russia's action will not stop us from working with our partners to find justice for the victims of chemical weapons. And we will not let up in our efforts to prevent the use of these weapons by anyone, anywhere.

The work of the JIM will not go to waste; we have their findings, we have their reports. And whatever Russia's actions today, the use of chemical weapons by anyone in Syria – to quote Minister Lavrov again – will be investigated and those who used them will be held into account. We owe it to the victims to ensure justice.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/russias-action-will-not-stop-us-from-working-with-our-partners-to-find-justice-for-the-victims-of-chemical-weapons