Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

UK welcomes conclusions of UN General Assembly's Third Committee

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The

UN Third Committee

concluded its 69th Session today, with important resolutions on Syria, Iran, Burma, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Death Penalty, Freedom of Religion or Belief, Privacy, and Women's Rights.

Foreign Office Minister Baroness Anelay said:

The United Nations Third Committee is a vital mechanism that gives the international community an opportunity to address human rights concerns. It has done so by putting a spotlight on countries where violations and abuses of human rights are prevalent, and on a range of thematic human rights issues, including women's rights, freedom of religion or belief and the death penalty. These words must now be the trigger for action.

I strongly support the General Assembly's condemnation of the human rights situation in Syria, which sends a powerful message of international support to the Syrian people. Violations of human rights by the Assad regime, including indiscriminate barrel bombing and use of chemical weapons against civilians, have created an environment that has contributed to the rise of extremist and barbaric groups such as ISIL. The world will hold to account all those responsible for the violations and abuses of the Syrian people. I fully support the work of the Commission of Inquiry for Syria and its efforts to prepare the ground for bringing criminals to justice, and regret the lack of cooperation by the Syrian authorities with the Commission. The UK condemns the gross violations and abuses of human rights perpetrated in Syria, as well as the intentional denial of humanitarian assistance to civilians.

I welcome the adoption of the resolution on Iran, which acknowledges the small signs of progress which have been made, but also notes that the situation remains dire and urgent action is required. Significant concerns remain about Iran's clampdown on some of the fundamental freedoms of its citizens, including freedom of religion and belief and freedom of expression, as well as the increasing number of executions.

I also welcome the adoption of the resolution on Burma. Progress has been made by the Burmese government and I would urge the authorities to now focus on areas where more needs to be done to improve the rights and freedoms of the people of Burma (you can read a full statement, by Mr Swire, on the adoption of the resolution onBurma

here

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By voting in favour of the resolution on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Third Committee has confirmed international concern at the findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry. I regret DPRK's response and urge the government to demonstrate that its recent offers of engagement reflect a genuine desire to address human rights violations (you can read a full statement, by Mr Swire, on the adoption of the resolution on DPRK

here

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The rising tide of violence in the name of religion has made the adoption by consensus of resolutions on freedom of religion or belief, and on combating intolerance more important than ever. I call upon all UN Member States to ensure that they translate these resolutions into practice and create a climate where no-one is persecuted or discriminated against on the grounds of their religion or belief.

The vote on the biennial resolution on a Moratorium on the Death Penalty resolution achieved a record high of 114 votes in favour. I hope that mounting support for a moratorium will help persuade all states to move towards abolition. I am pleased that the momentum generated by UK leadership on tackling violence against women was reflected at the General Assembly with robust resolutions on ending female genital mutilation, child, early and forced marriage, and a comprehensive resolution that covered many elements of violence against women. I am also heartened to see that the only reference to sexual orientation was retained, with wide support, in the resolution on extra-judicial killings after a troubling attempt by some countries to remove this reference by vote.

The increasing threats to, and harassment of, human rights defenders and restrictions to the space for civil society to operate is a particular cause of concern. I am pleased that the resolution on Privacy in the Digital Age recognised this issue and highlighted the fact that where Governments carry out their legitimate business to protect their citizens from terrorism and crime they do so in accordance with an open, transparent and accountable legal framework and in line with their international human rights obligations. The UK supports the condemnation of the use of unlawful and arbitrary surveillance.

The Committee’s work to promote and protect human rights is more important than ever. The UK will continue to be tireless in our efforts to speak out for those without a voice and to stand up for the universality of human rights in all fora. As we look ahead to Human Rights Day on 10 December and the March Human Rights Council, let us make sure that the words of these resolutions become a call for action.

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