Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

UK welcomes UN General Assembly’s Third Committee

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The

UN Third Committee

concluded its 70th Session today, with important resolutions on Syria, Iran, Burma, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Counter-Terrorism, Torture and Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Foreign Office Minister Baroness Anelay said:

For seventy years, the United Nations’ Third Committee has been a vital mechanism for the international community to address human rights concerns. It does this by passing resolutions on countries where violations and abuses of human rights are prevalent, and on a range of thematic issues, including counter-terrorism, freedom of religion or belief and torture. We must again ensure that these words are turned into action.

Syria remains the world’s biggest humanitarian and security crisis. I strongly support the Third Committee’s condemnation of the human rights situation in Syria; it sends a powerful message of international support to the Syrian people. Five years of conflict have seen many violations of human rights by the Assad regime - including indiscriminate barrel bombing and use of chemical weapons against civilians - and have created an environment that has contributed to the rise of extremist and barbaric groups such as ISIL. The world will hold all those responsible to account. I fully support the work of the Commission of Inquiry and its efforts to prepare the ground for bringing criminals to justice. I regret the Syrian authorities’ continued lack of cooperation 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, whilst acknowledging the small signs of progress which have been made, notes that the human rights situation remains dire and that urgent action is required. Significant concerns remain about Iran’s increased use of the death penalty, including for juvenile offenders and non-serious crimes, and the continued clampdown on some of the fundamental freedoms of its citizens, including freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression.

The 8 November elections in Burma represent an historic opportunity to cement the reform process begun in 2011. As we welcome the adoption of the resolution by consensus, we look to Burma to deliver on the will of the people as expressed through elections, and to improve the rights and freedoms of all the people of Burma, not least those of the Rohingya community (you can read a full statement, by Mr Swire, on the adoption of the resolution on Burma

here

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I welcome the vote in favour of the resolution on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), reaffirming international concern at the appalling human rights situation. We urge the DPRK to take action to end widespread human rights violations and call on the government to engage with the international community to bring about substantive change to the human rights situation.

Recent terrorist atrocities have shown the importance of UN Member States working together to combat terrorism in all its forms. So I fully endorse the resolution on Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism passed last week. Deplorable acts of violence continue to be carried out in the name of religion around the world.

In adopting the resolutions on freedom of religion or belief and on combating intolerance, Member States have demonstrated they are working together to fight religious persecution. No individual should be discriminated against based on the grounds of their religion or belief, or for holding no religion or belief.

This year has made painfully clear the threat faced by those engaged in journalistic activity. I call upon all Member States to translate the resolution on the safety of journalists into practice. No one should be intimidated or murdered simply for exercising their freedom of expression, online or offline. Where such crimes do occur, they must be properly investigated and prosecuted.

The resolution on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment was again adopted by consensus. As in previous years, the UK co-sponsored this resolution. I particularly endorse the recognition that States must protect the rights of those facing criminal sentences, including the death penalty, in accordance with their international obligations.

The UK continues to champion gender equality, non-discrimination for all and the human rights of women, girls and children everywhere. I was particularly proud that we were able to defend important language on Comprehensive Sexuality Education this year.

The Committee’s work to promote and protect human rights is more important than ever in the UN’s seventieth anniversary year. As a strong supporter of the rules based international order, 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 words agreed here become actions that make a difference.

Further information

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