Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"This sickening use of chemical weapons - weapons that Asad agreed in 2013 to destroy – is just the latest in a long list of abhorrent acts."

2017-04-12

Thank you Madam President. And I would also like to thank you Staffan for your briefing, and for your unrelenting efforts to secure a political solution to the conflict in Syria. You have our continued full support.

Despite your efforts and those of this Council, and the international community, the people of Syria have been denied a political solution for more than six years. They have suffered over six years of ever increasing, ever escalating barbarity; over six years of failed ceasefires and false dawns. For over six years, this Council has been held to ransom by Russia's shameless support for the Asad regime; support which the regime is flaunting. Throughout that time, we have met in this Chamber to discuss atrocity after atrocity. Hoping that Asad had finally reached the depth of his cruelty and would finally see the need for dialogue. And yet every time, without fail, he has plunged to new lows.

Chemical weapons scientists at Porton Down, in the United Kingdom, have analysed samples obtained from Khan Shaykun, and these have tested positive for the nerve agent sarin, or a sarin-like substance. The United Kingdom therefore shares the US assessment that it is highly likely that the regime was responsible for a sarin attack on Khan Shaykun on the 4th of April.

This sickening use of chemical weapons - weapons that Asad agreed in 2013 to destroy – is just the latest in a long list of abhorrent acts. With that attack, he has made clear that he is not committed to a ceasefire, or to the Astana process, ruining Russia's credibility.

And as we mourn the victims of the chemical attack on Khan Shaykun, we must not forget the 13.5 million people who, thanks to Asad, are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, who are in urgent need of a long overdue peace.

It is clear today, as it has been for some time, that there can be no place for Asad in Syria's future.

But, Madam President, there is a way to end this nightmare that the Syrian people continue to suffer. The Geneva Communiqué of 2012 and our unanimous resolution 2254 charts the

way to peace in Syria. We have a Special Representative in you, Staffan, who is rightly determined to keep the political process alive and pursue a renewed UN facilitated effort. We have an opposition prepared to take a pragmatic approach to discussions. And we have millions upon millions of Syrians, inside and outside the country crying out for long overdue peace.

And yet we are still here in this chamber, with the regime showing no interest in peace, encouraged by Russia's support in this Council to keep dropping bombs, to keep using chemical weapons.

Time and time again Russia has abused its veto to protect the regime and to defend its use of chemical weapons. And what has Russia got in return for its seven vetoes in six years? Let me tell you.

Russia's initiative in 2013 to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons has been exposed as a shambles. Russian pride in the Astana process has been turned to humiliation. And Russia's credibility and reputation across the world have been poisoned by its toxic association with Asad. They have chosen to side with a murderous, barbaric criminal, rather than with their international peers.

They have chosen the wrong side of history.

However, it is not too late for Russia to change course. It is not too late for Russia to fulfil its responsibilities as a permanent member of this Security Council. It is not too late for Russia to use, finally, its influence over the regime to bring this conflict to an end. Those efforts must begin meaningfully with attempts to end the use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs, real efforts to bring about a ceasefire and real efforts to ensure proper humanitarian access.

In doing so, Russia can create the space needed for a renewed push on the political process; one that leads to that political transition to a government that represents all Syrians.

Should they do so, should they choose that path, we stand ready to work with Russia to preserve Syrian institutions through the political transition. We stand ready to find ways of cooperating with Russia to counter Da'esh and other international terrorist threats. We stand ready to engage with Russia as a constructive partner on this Council. While Asad offers Russia only shame and humiliation; we offer Russia something else; the chance, once again, to work with the international community as a credible member.

Finally, Madam President, the Syrian people have waited for over six years. Hundreds of thousands have died. Countless hospitals, schools and homes have been destroyed. Now, more than ever, the international community must come together to end this senseless conflict.

And that’s why we stand shoulder to shoulder with the United States and their decision to take military action against the Shayrat airfield, from where last week’s attacks were launched. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our G7 allies and all those who are committed to deter the future use of chemical weapons and, finally, to bring peace to Syria.

Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/this-sickening-use-of-chemical-weapons-weapons-that-asad-agreed-in-2013-to-destroy-is-just-the-latest-in-a-long-list-of-abhorrent-acts