Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary statement on Iraq and Ending Sexual Violence Summit

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Mr Speaker, with permission I will make a Statement on Iraq, and update the House on the outcome of last week's Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict.

The Sunni extremist group 'Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant', ISIL, launched a series of attacks and car bombings in Iraqi cities including Baghdad, Samarra, Ramadi and Jalawla over the last ten days, culminating in the capture of Mosul on Tuesday.

From Mosul, ISIL with other armed groups took control of the towns on the main route to Baghdad, including Tikrit, 110 miles north of the capital. The Iraqi Security Forces initially proved unable to resist these attacks, although there are now signs of a fight back in the area around Samarra.

These are extremely grave developments. ISIL is the most violent and brutal militant group in the Middle East. It has a long record of atrocities, including use of IEDs, abductions, torture and killings. The reported massacre of 1700 Shia air force recruits is more evidence of its brutality.

ISIL's aim is to establish a Shari'a Islamic State in the region, and it is pursuing these goals by attacking the Government of Iraq, gaining control of territory, and inciting sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia Muslims. The group has bases in northern Syria as well as in Iraq. While the majority of its members are Iraqi or Syrian, it also includes a significant number of foreign fighters among its ranks. As I have previously told this House, we estimate the number of UK-linked individuals fighting in Syria to include approximately 400 British Nationals and other UK-linked individuals who could present a particular risk should they return to the UK. And some of these are inevitably fighting with ISIL.

Over the last few days I have held discussions with Foreign Ministers from the region, including with Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari and Turkish Foreign Minister Davotoglu, with whom I discussed the welfare of over sixty Turkish citizens kidnapped in Mosul.

Our national interest lies in supporting a sovereign and democratic Iraq to resist these threats, offering assistance where necessary, and working with others to prevent the spread of terrorism in Iraq and throughout the region.

On Friday I held talks with Secretary Kerry here in London. We agreed that the prime responsibility for leading the response to these events lies with the Iraqi government. The United States, which is the country with the most appropriate assets and capabilities, is considering a range of options that could help the Iraqi Security Forces push back on ISIL advances. President Obama has been clear that action taken by the United States will only succeed if accompanied by a political response from the Iraqi Government.

We are taking action in three areas: promoting political unity among those who support a democratic Iraqi state and stability in the region; offering assistance where appropriate and possible; and alleviating humanitarian suffering. We have made it clear that this does not involve planning a military intervention by the United Kingdom.

On the first of these points, yesterday I underlined to the Iraqi Foreign Minister the need for his colleagues to form a new and inclusive government that brings together all Iraq's different groups and that is able to command support across Iraqi society. ISIL is taking advantage of political disaffection, including among Saddam-era officers and soldiers, and Sunni tribal fighters, who have lost trust in the Iraqi Government. Overcoming this will require a concerted political effort by the government, including working with the Kurdistan Regional Government against this common threat. I welcome the fact that the Iraqi Supreme Court has today ratified the large majority of the results of April's elections, and I call on them to announce the full results as soon as possible to allow for the rapid formation of a new government in Baghdad.

On our second objective, we are examining what more we can do to assist the Iraqi authorities directly in their security response. We are urging them to take effective measures to organise its security forces effectively and push ISIL back from the areas it has occupied, while protecting civilian life, infrastructure and vital services. We are discussing with the Iraqi government areas for co-operation, including the possibility of offering counter-terrorism expertise.

We are also providing consular assistance to a small number of British Nationals who have been affected. For this purpose, a UK MOD Operational Liaison and Reconnaissance Team arrived in Baghdad on Saturday to help assess the situation on the ground and assist the Embassy in contingency planning.

Third, we have responded rapidly to the humanitarian emergency. Around half a million people are reported to have been displaced in the north and now need urgent support. Last week we were the first donor country to send a Field Team to the Kurdistan Region where they met UN and NGO contacts and the Kurdish authorities. My Right Honourable Friend the International Development Secretary announced on Saturday that we would provide £3million of immediate assistance including £2million from the Rapid Response Facility to NGOs for water and sanitation and other emergency relief; and £1million to the UNHCR for mobile

protection teams and establishing camps. We are considering urgently what other assistance we can provide.

The rise of sectarianism and religious intolerance is fuelling instability in the Middle East. This has been compounded by the brutality of the Assad regime, whose relentless war against its own people has created an opening for extremists. That is why we will continue to support the moderate opposition in Syria who have had the courage to fight directly against ISIL and other extremists, as well as urging the Iraqi government to take the political and military steps required to defeat such groups in Iraq. We are also working to reinforce stability across the region, including through providing significant security support to the governments of Lebanon and Jordan, as well as £243 million in humanitarian assistance to those countries.

We will intensify our efforts in the coming days and weeks to tackle this serious threat to international peace and security.

Mr Speaker, addressing the crises of today should never prevent us from dealing with the longer-term issues that are fundamental to conflict prevention in many parts of the world.

Last week I co-hosted the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, the largest ever Summit held on this issue. 129 country delegations attended, 79 Ministers and there were 1,700 delegates in total including 8 UN Agency Heads, as well as presidents and prosecutors from the ICC and international tribunals, and over 300 delegates from conflict affected countries.

This Summit had two primary objectives, to agree practical action to tackle impunity for the use of rape as a weapon of war, and to begin to change global attitudes to these crimes.

We opened the Summit up to thousands of members of the public at 175 public events. Our Embassies held events to mirror what was in going on in London for the entire 84 hour period, and we mounted an intensive social media campaign that reached all parts of the world.

This was the most important milestone in our efforts to address this issue and my intention is to create unstoppable momentum in addressing these crimes, which are among the worst experienced in the world today. We set in motion a series of unprecedented practical steps and commitments.

We launched the first ever International Protocol on how to document and investigate sexual violence in conflict as a means of overcoming the barriers to prosecutions of these crimes.

I announced £6 million in new UK funding to support survivors of rape, and the United States, Finland, Bahrain, Australia, Japan and others including European partners also made new

and generous pledges. The AU also announced a pilot project in the Central African Republic to respond to the urgent needs of victims of sexual violence.

The Somali government launched a new action plan on Somalia, supported by the UN and the international community, for addressing sexual violence, which has blighted the lives of thousands there.

Within the Summit I convened a special meeting on security in Nigeria following the abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls in April and a summit on this issue in Paris last month. We agreed that a Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit should be made operational immediately. The countries of the region also agreed rapidly to implement joint or coordinated patrols along their borders and Cameroon committed to add a battalion to that regional task force. The UK, US and France pledged to support of these regional efforts. On behalf of the UK I announced a separate package of support for Nigeria including: increased tactical training for the Nigerian army, assistance to regional security and intelligence cooperation, and a joint UK/US educational programme to educate an additional one million children in Nigeria. All the parties present also agreed on the need for UN sanctions against Boko Haram's leadership and Ansaru, another dangerous terrorist organisation.

Finally, states and delegates at the Summit joined together to sign a Statement of Action, uniting governments, UN Agencies, civil society, experts and survivors with a shared determination to tackle these issues.

We will now work hard to ensure the momentum is sustained and accelerated in the months and years ahead.

We will publish a comprehensive report on the Summit that will distil the expert recommendations and political discussions that took.

We will turn our focus to practical implementation of the International Protocol in priority countries. And we will continue to use our team of experts to strengthen the capacity of conflict affected countries around the world. For the past two years the United Kingdom has led the way internationally in addressing these vital issues and we must continue to do so until the scourge of sexual of violence is finally confronted, addressed and defeated.

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