

Speech: Lord Ahmad welcomes conclusions of the 36th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

The UN Human Rights Council concluded its 36th Session today with important resolutions on Burundi, Yemen, Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the death penalty. This session also saw the adoption of the UK's Universal Periodic Review, where we have been making good progress in important areas.

I am delighted to have attended the Council this session and to have reaffirmed the UK's strong commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. I had a positive first meeting with High Commissioner Zeid to discuss human rights priorities and had the opportunity to meet members of the Syria Commission of Inquiry to set out our continued support to their work. I also met civil society and NGOs to discuss, amongst other topics, the plight of Rohingya Muslims in Burma and the humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh. Protecting human rights and individual freedoms is a priority for this Government, for our Prime Minister, and for me personally. It is our collective responsibility, and we will continue to use our membership of the Council to speak out about human rights violations and abuses around the world.

I am pleased to see that resolutions on Burundi, Syria, Yemen, DRC, have been adopted at this session, as well as a Council decision on Burma. It is essential we work together with other Member States to hold perpetrators to account.

Burma

The UK welcomes the adoption of a Council decision on Burma, extending the mandate of the Fact Finding Mission. Given the deeply concerning human rights situation across the country, including in Kachin, Shan and Rakhine States, its work is crucial. We once again urge Burma to grant the Mission access to the country, and to cooperate fully with its mandate. We also urge the security forces, under Commander in Chief Min Aung Hlaing, to stop the violence in Rakhine State, allow a rapid return for refugees, and support the swift implementation of the Annan Commission's recommendations by the civilian government.

Ukraine

The UK continues to see the regular report into, and the discussion of, the human rights situation in Ukraine as essential. We are deeply concerned by the continued high numbers of civilian casualties, detailed by OHCHR, and urge all parties to the conflict to work urgently to achieve a full and sustained ceasefire. We also welcome the thematic report into the human rights situation in illegally annexed Crimea which was undertaken despite the

refusal of Russia de facto authorities to allow access to the High Commissioner and his Office, as called for in UN General Assembly Resolution 71/205. We reiterate our call for the de facto authorities to grant access to Crimea for international monitors.

Syria

The human rights situation in Syria remains deeply concerning. The horrific violations and abuses the Syrian people continue to face are carefully recorded by the Commission of Inquiry. Attacks on civilians, obstruction of humanitarian aid, and forced displacement of civilians continue to be carried out by the Syrian regime. It is vital that the Council maintains a strong and unified stance on Syria. An important part of our efforts must be to hold those responsible to account. We therefore welcome the Resolution the Council has adopted and call upon all parties to ensure that the rights of all Syrian citizens are upheld and respected.

Yemen

The deteriorating human rights situation in Yemen was an important priority at this council. We remain deeply concerned by the large scale human rights abuses that continue. We welcome the Council achieving consensus to establish a group of eminent international and regional experts as a concrete step taken by the international community to address the crisis and bring relief to innocent civilians.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The resolution on the Democratic Republic of Congo builds on the international investigation mandated at the last HRC into the violence in the Kasai region. The Council is right to be seriously concerned by heinous human rights abuses and violations that have taken place there. It is important that we have agreed to have a comprehensive OHCHR report on the human rights situation as well as enhanced dialogues through the HRC calendar year to make sure responsibility is determined. I trust that the authorities in DRC will grant the access to the investigation, mandated in June, to ensure that those who bear responsibility will be brought to justice.

Somalia

The UK welcomes the adoption by consensus of the renewed resolution on Somalia. The resolution acknowledges the progress Somalia has made in strengthening the protection of human rights, and the commitment of the Federal Government of Somalia to continuing this progress. It is now vital that Somalia, together with support from the international community, takes forward the steps laid out in the resolution. This includes the establishment of the Human Rights Commission to end the culture of impunity and hold accountable those who commit human rights violations and abuses.

Sudan

I welcome the resolution that the Human Rights Council has adopted on Sudan. We are encouraged by the Government of Sudan's increased willingness to engage with the international community on human rights issues, including with the Independent Expert. However, regrettably, fundamental freedoms continue to be restricted across Sudan. I therefore welcome the unified stance that the Council has taken. We urge the Government to increase accountability for human rights violations, and to cooperate with the UN/AU Mission in Darfur to increase protection for civilians.

Burundi

The UK remains deeply concerned at the human rights situation in Burundi and is disappointed at the Burundi Government's response to the Commission of Inquiry's report, and in particular, their rejection of the report's conclusions that there were reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity had been committed. Our national statement outlined worrying reports that gunmen entered the office of the UN OHCHR in Bujumbura. The Government of Burundi has a duty to protect diplomatic staff and premises. To this end, I welcome the resolutions on Burundi, and urge the Burundi Government to engage with the international community to bring an end to the violence and to hold the perpetrators to account.

Central African Republic

The UK thanks the Independent Expert on CAR for her report to the Council and welcomes the extension of the mandate of the Independent Expert. The UK is concerned at the increase in human rights violations and abuses due to a resurgence of violence between armed groups. Reports of deliberate targeting of civilians by armed groups, in some cases based on ethnicity or religion is deeply troubling. The continued violence has seen significant numbers of displaced people who are without access to basic humanitarian needs. The UK urges the international community to provide essential assistance to the people of CAR to prevent the onset of a humanitarian crisis.

Modern Slavery

I spoke at the start of this session about the importance the UK places on tackling the crime of modern slavery and our Prime Minister's personal commitment and leadership to eradicating human trafficking, modern slavery, and forced labour. The newly published "Global Estimates" further highlight the enormous scale of the challenge. At the UN General Assembly this month, I also had the honour to speak at a ["Why Slavery?"](#) event, launching a campaign to raise awareness of modern slavery. Tackling modern slavery requires the concerted effort of us all but government leadership is crucial. The UK's [Call to Action](#), launched at an event chaired by our Prime Minister and UN Secretary General Guterres on 19 September, has been endorsed by 37 countries and we will continue to work tirelessly to get more to sign up. I also encourage all governments to ratify the International Labour Organization's

protocol on forced labour and to work with us in supporting the [“50 for Freedom”](#) campaign. We will continue to work with the international community and use opportunities such as the UPR to press for further action on this critical agenda.

PSVI

At the UN General Assembly, together with Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten, I also launched the [Principles for Global Action](#) on preventing and addressing stigma affecting victims of sexual violence in conflict. The Principles for Global Action is a key tool for policymakers and practitioners and aims to provide a survivor-centred approach to working to end stigma associated with conflict-related sexual violence. This document incorporates the expertise of 13 UN Agencies, NGOs, civil society, academics, international organisations and donor countries. The guide was also informed by experiences of survivors and practitioners from 16 conflict affected countries, and is a truly global document to help tackle stigma worldwide.

UK Universal Period Review Adoption

In May this year the UK underwent its 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review. Last week, we set out our position on all 227 recommendations we received from Member States in May during the UPR dialogue. We also voluntarily committed to providing an update on up to 5 recommendations by May 2018, and an update on all recommendations via a Mid Term Report in 2019. We are clear that the UPR is not just a three and a half hour dialogue that occurs for all States every four years. Each cycle builds on the last, with Mid Term Reports and other updates being an important way to demonstrate ongoing commitment to the UPR.

The Human Rights Council is a crucial platform, allowing Member States to support and uphold universal rights around the world. As an outward-looking, globally-minded, and inclusive country, the UK has always played an active role in the Council and other UN human rights fora. The UK will continue to promote universal human rights as a foundation for development and a vital tool for conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation.

[Press release: International Development Secretary calls for aid to reach Burma](#)

Following the UN Security Council’s meeting on Burma yesterday, International Development Secretary Priti Patel has continued her calls for humanitarian

access into Burma to ensure that further lives are not lost.

International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

I am appalled that more than half a million Rohingyas have been forced to flee their homes because of the horrific violence in Burma. Those who escaped, carrying little or nothing, have had to make the treacherous journey across the border into Bangladesh to seek safety, with countless people dying or losing loved ones.

I implore the Burmese authorities to ensure immediate and sustained humanitarian access into northern Rakhine State so that UK aid can provide a lifeline to all those who have been left to suffer and who are in desperate need of food, water, shelter and healthcare.

The relentless denial of aid is a matter of life and death for those still in northern Rakhine. It is utterly intolerable that the military who are responsible for this inhumane catastrophe have not heeded calls for restraint and pleas to allow those who are now refugees to return safely to their homes.

Britain is leading the way as the largest bilateral donor to the crisis in Bangladesh and UK aid is already making a difference on the ground, providing food for 65,000 of the most vulnerable victims, health care for 50,000, and emergency shelter for up to 26,355. We are also supporting 7,500 children, many of whom have suffered traumatic ordeals and are at risk of sexual violence and trafficking.

The world must follow the UK in helping the Rohingyas, not just now but in the long-term.

Notes to editors:

The UK is deeply concerned by the violence taking place in Rakhine State, particularly by the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing that violence and the reports of grave human rights violations taking place.

As of 29 September 501,800 people have fled the violence into neighbouring Bangladesh. Numbers are rising.

The UK has been a leader in responding to the crisis – in speed and size – to help meet the urgent humanitarian needs of vulnerable men, women and children in both Bangladesh and Burma.

Prior to the latest violence which began on the 25 August 2017, we committed £5.9 million to meet the needs of the most vulnerable refugees and the host communities who support them.

In response to the latest influx we have provided a further £30 million of support.

Our existing work in the region meant that we were already in position to provide life-saving support when the crisis flared – without this, aid would have taken much longer to reach those in need. And we are sending more aid to Bangladesh.

In Rakhine State in Burma, aid workers have been getting British-funded humanitarian assistance to many tens of thousands of people. DFID's partners are ready to provide emergency food to 30,000 people and to treat more than 3,000 severely malnourished children and pregnant women, but the Burmese authorities must stop refusing to grant access.

This lack of access on the Burma side means vital needs will not be met and lives lost. Britain urgently calls upon the Burmese military to end the violence in Rakhine and the Government of Burma to allow immediate and full humanitarian access and support for the people and communities affected.

We have raised the situation in two UN Security Council meetings and led work in the Council to develop an international response. The Foreign Secretary also held a Ministerial meeting of General Assembly members at the UN General Assembly this month to drive this process forward.

Mark Field, Minister for Asia at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, visited Rakhine State in Burma on Wednesday, 27 September. He held talks in Burma with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to press for an urgent resolution to the crisis in Rakhine.

On Thursday, 28 September Minister Burt and Minister Field hosted a series of high-level talks in Dhaka, Bangladesh with key Government officials and aid agencies to identify how best to provide lifesaving support to the large influx of refugees in Bangladesh.

Britain is ready to support the recommendations of the Kofi Annan led Rakhine Advisory Commission to assist the long-term development of all people in Rakhine state, but right now the immediate action is for the security forces to end the violence and the Government of Burma to allow humanitarian access.

[News story: BPS 2017 payments exchange rate set](#)

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has confirmed the exchange rate for Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) 2017 payments made in sterling.

The euro exchange rate for calculating BPS 2017 payments has been set. The rate, an average of the European Central Bank exchange rates set in September, will be €1 = 0.89470.

BPS payments for England are set in euros and then converted into sterling. The previous year's exchange rates for BPS were:

- BPS 2016: €1 = £0.85228
- BPS 2015: €1 = £0.73129

RPA will make full payments on BPS 2017 claims from the beginning of December.

RPA makes all payments directly into bank accounts by BACS transfer.

[Press release: Appointment of Matthew Rycroft as Permanent Secretary at the Department for International Development](#)

Matthew Rycroft, currently UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations, has been appointed as DFID Permanent Secretary with effect from January 2018.

The Cabinet Secretary, with the agreement of the Prime Minister, has today announced that Matthew Rycroft, currently UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations, has been appointed as the new Permanent Secretary at the Department for International Development (DFID) with effect from January 2018.

Welcoming Matthew's appointment Sir Jeremy Heywood said:

I am delighted to announce the appointment of Matthew Rycroft as the Permanent Secretary for the Department for International Development. He is doing an excellent job as the UK Permanent Representative to the UN and will bring to the role a wealth of relevant experience from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Number Ten. I look forward to working with him as he starts his work delivering DFID's important mission. I would also like to thank Nick Dyer for his excellent custodianship of the Department pending Matthew's arrival in January 2018.

Priti Patel, Secretary of State for International Development, said:

I look forward to welcoming Matthew Rycroft as DFID's new Permanent Secretary. Matthew's track record throughout his career, and his

interest in international development, mean that he brings to the role a global perspective and understanding. This is central to my ambition that we continue to lead the UK's work to end extreme poverty and to build a safer, healthier, more prosperous world for people in developing countries and in the UK.

Matthew Rycroft said:

It is a huge honour to be given the opportunity to lead DFID and support Priti Patel and her ministerial team at this exciting time for the Department. I look forward to working with my new colleagues and across Whitehall: to ensure that the UK remains a world leader in the fight against poverty; to support the delivery of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development; and to tackle other global challenges.

Notes to Editors

Arrangements for appointing a successor to Matthew Rycroft will be announced in due course.

[Press release: Minister hosts 'Call for Evidence' roundtable to improve accessibility of elections](#)

Minister called on the campaigners, who attended a roundtable hosted by the Minister, to share his Call for Evidence on how people with disabilities experience registering to vote and voting itself.

At the roundtable held during National Inclusion Week, the Minister highlighted his visits to every part of the United Kingdom as part of his Every Voice Matters Tour, which have helped him understand how to tackle barriers to voter registration.

As a direct result of this, changes have been made to the Certificate of Visual Impairment so it can be used by local authorities to support blind and partially sighted people to vote at elections, once their consent has been provided.

The Call for Evidence will ask people to provide information that will: * enhance the Government's understanding of the experiences of disabled people in registering to vote and casting their vote; * help identify if current

mechanisms to support disabled people to participate in the democratic process are sufficient; and * identify examples of good practice provided by Electoral Service Teams to disabled people at elections.

Minister for the Constitution, Chris Skidmore said:

This Call for Evidence is part of the process to help ensure that every disabled person is able to have that equal chance and that equal right, to participate in our democracy, and to have their say.

We want to ensure that our elections are as accessible as possible, and to remove any barriers that exist to democratic participation – every voice matters and we want ours to be a democracy that works for everyone.