

Speech: “I repeat the United Kingdom’s call for North Korea to allow human rights actors immediate and unhindered access to assess the human rights situation”

Thank you Mr President.

And thank you also to High Commissioner Zeid and Merislav Jenca for their harrowing words on the dire situation in the DPRK. Sadly it is unsurprising that the regime maintains a stranglehold on every aspect of its citizens’ lives. The United Kingdom, like other Security Council members, views the human rights situation in North Korea with deep concern and dismay.

The regime’s treatment of its own people is yet another example of its unashamed contempt of the international rules based system.

That is why we fully support the Security Council’s wish to draw attention to the shameful living conditions of the North Korean people as well as to North Korea’s illegal nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, which we have condemned in Resolutions 2371 and 2375.

We must maintain international focus on the human rights situation in North Korea through both the UN in New York and the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

We welcome the UN visit last week and we encourage the regime to engage in a meaningful way.

Evidence of the leadership’s appalling behaviour towards its own people is impossible to ignore.

People lack freedom of religion and expression. They have minimal control over their livelihoods and resources. The state controls what they see, what they consume and how they behave, using the threat of extreme punishment to keep people under its thumb.

Naysayers are disappeared, or jailed, or publicly executed to demonstrate the price of freedom. The Global Slavery Index estimates that more than a million people are victims of modern slavery.

Yet we know from defector testimonies that, despite the fear instilled in every North Korean, there are many brave individuals who would rather take their chances fleeing than remain gagged and bound by the regime.

Like the soldier who recently defected across the Demilitarised Zone. His daring escape was act of desperation as well as of hope. His starved physical condition speaks volumes about the standards of health and welfare in a

country that professes to put the military first. And therefore how it treats those who are most vulnerable.

We urge all Members not to return defectors back to this miserable situation. This sends a message that we condone the behaviour.

We also urge all Members not to profit from the people of North Korea's misery by employing North Korean nationals who are sent abroad to generate foreign currency, which is used by the regime to fund its illegal missile programmes, as stated in Resolution 2321.

The systematic violations of human rights by the regime goes beyond its own citizens or borders. The death of US citizen Otto Warmbier following his detention; the 17 Japanese nationals abducted by the regime; the assassination of Kim Jong Nam in Malaysia. These are all examples of the North Korean regime's contempt for the international rules based system.

This contempt is further exemplified by the regime's denial of access to independent observers of the human rights situation. Or to engage in meaningful dialogue. Or to act on the 2014 Commission of Inquiries Report that highlighted "wide ranging and ongoing crimes against humanity". The regime has rejected the Third Committee Resolution that called upon it to respect the basic rights of its people.

Today, I repeat the United Kingdom's call for North Korea to allow human rights actors immediate and unhindered access to assess the human rights situation in the country.

Our message to the regime must be clear and united. We must use all the diplomatic and economic tools at our disposal to deliver this message.

There is a very different path that is still open to the regime. This path leads to security and prosperity. It leads to improved lives for their citizens. All the members of this Council and beyond, must work together to persuade the North Korean leadership to pursue this path.

To do so it must end illegal missile tests. It must genuinely engage with the international community. It must take serious steps to improve the human rights situation for all its citizens.

Real positive change to the livelihoods of the North Korean people will not happen overnight. But it will not happen at all for as long as North Korea pursues its current course.

Mr President, we are committed to working with partners on the Council, and beyond, to tackle this challenge. The world looks to us all, and above all the North Korean regime, to support a change for the better.

Thank you.