

Speech: Statement at the Human Rights Council Special Session on Burma

I welcome this session. The international community cannot ignore the desperate plight of the Rohingya Muslims. I thank the Bangladesh government for ensuring that refugees receive urgent aid. I am also pleased that the UK has contributed £59 million in support.

The UK is committed to working with international partners to resolve the situation in Rakhine. At September's Council I called on Burmese security forces to stop committing human rights violations against the Rohingya. Today's session, together with the overwhelming vote in favour of the OIC-led resolution in the Third Committee and the United Nations – which the UK co-sponsored – reflects growing international outrage at these despicable atrocities.

I welcome the UN Security Council's adoption of the first Presidential Statement on Burma for ten years. This significant step sent a clear message: international pressure will not relent until the state authorities act to enable refugees to return to Rakhine voluntarily, with dignity and, importantly, in safety.

The authorities must grant full humanitarian access to Northern Rakhine so that affected communities can receive vital assistance. They must also cooperate fully with the UN's human rights system, including the Independent Fact Finding Mission established by this very Council.

The UK believes that supporting the civilian government is the best way to ensure fair treatment for the Rohingya and respect for human rights. UK Ministers have urged Aung San Suu Kyi and senior members of the civilian government to take the necessary steps.

Mr President, as the UK Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict I want to draw particular attention to the harrowing reports of rape, sexual abuse and brutality from refugees in Cox's Bazaar, indeed as we heard directly from Special Representative Patten who described this in graphic terms.

Last month, the Head of the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative joined Ms Patten's visit to the refugee camps, and heard appalling accounts from survivors.

We have since deployed two civilian experts to Bangladesh. They will make recommendations to the UK government on further support to survivors of sexual violence, including support for the investigation and documentation of these abhorrent crimes.

Today's Special Session demonstrates the strength of international feeling about the situation facing the Rohingya community. This current crisis was

precipitated by long-standing inequality between communities in Rakhine. The state authorities must act swiftly, not only to address this inequality but also to relieve the suffering of the Rohingya and restore security to enable them to return with dignity and in safety and allow them to rebuild their lives.