

# Speech: UK closing statement by Lord Ahmad at the 40th Session of the Human Rights Council

As I said during my [speech at the Council on 25 February](#), in an ideal world, states and non-state actors would not violate and abuse human rights. Sadly, we do not live in that ideal world, and that is why the Human Rights Council is such a vitally important part of the rules based international system. The UK continues to be one of the Council's strongest supporters and we are underlining that commitment by standing for election to the Council next year, for the 2021-2023 term.

I welcome the [UN's continuing advocacy on media freedom](#), including commitments made by the Secretary General. A free media is essential for democracy, economic prosperity and the protection of human rights. All states must come together to remove impediments to a free media and ensure justice for those who commit violence against journalists. We hope ministers from around the world will join us, and our Canadian co-hosts, in London on 10-11 July for our international conference to agree a meaningful way forward.

This has been an important Council in terms of country resolutions and issues of topical concern. On China, we supported a side event that focused on the situation in Xinjiang and we continue to call on China to implement the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. On Venezuela, we co-sponsored a US-led side event that highlighted the human rights situation there, and also supported a joint statement to the Council.

Turning to [Syria](#), I welcome the resolution adopted by the Council. The liberation of the last territory held by Daesh is a historic moment, but Syria is far from returning to normal. The international community must continue to highlight ongoing violations and abuses by all sides, and support UN-led efforts for a political resolution. The Commission of Inquiry's work is vital, and I welcome the renewal of its mandate for another year.

I am pleased that the Council [renewed the mandate of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan](#), with South Sudan's agreement. This enables the Commission to continue its vital work in monitoring human rights and tackling impunity. The Commission plays an important role in supporting implementation of South Sudan's peace deal and I urge South Sudan's continued cooperation.

We welcome the adoption of the resolution on the human rights situation in [Nicaragua](#), which highlights restrictions on civil society and the independent press. I am alarmed by the police's arbitrary use of force against, and arrest of, peaceful protestors last weekend. If Nicaragua is to move forward, the Government must end the repression of its citizens, create the right climate for inclusive political dialogue and participate with genuine intent to reach a peaceful negotiated solution.

I welcome the [renewal of the mandate for the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran](#). This provides an important signal that the international community remains concerned with unfair judicial processes that fall significantly below international standards, the arbitrary detention of dual nationals and others, and deterioration in the protection of freedoms of expression and of religion or belief. Iran should grant the Special Rapporteur immediate access so that he can properly fulfil his mandate.

Turning to [Libya](#), the resolution underlines the need for all parties, including the Government of National Accord and the UN, to continue to improve the human rights situation. Full support for the UN-led Action Plan will be crucial to address human rights violations and abuses as it provides the best route to a sustainable political settlement, with greater security and stability.

I am encouraged by [Sri Lanka's agreement to co-sponsor a further resolution](#) continuing the commitments made to the Human Rights Council in October 2015 and March 2017. The UK will continue to support Sri Lanka as it implements its commitments.

Elsewhere, I welcome the renewal of the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the [situation of human rights in Myanmar](#), the [Independent Expert for Mali](#) and the Special Rapporteur on the [situation of human rights in the DPRK](#). I also welcome the adoption of the resolution on [Human Rights monitoring in the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia](#)

For the reasons the [Foreign Secretary set out in his article](#), the UK voted against four resolutions on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, tabled under agenda item 7. While we welcome the decision to table a fifth resolution, on accountability, under agenda item 2 in response to the High Commissioner's report, the UK abstained [our explanation of vote](#) because it did not address the actions of non-state actors such as Hamas. I want to stress that these votes should not be misconstrued in any way as a vote against either Palestinian self-determination, or against appropriate and proportionate scrutiny of human rights abuses or illegal settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We remain committed to a two state solution and support justified scrutiny of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories under appropriate agenda items.

Finally, I welcome the support for the [joint UK and Austrian led statement](#) made in response to the deteriorating human rights situation in Cameroon. This demonstrates widespread concern and strengthens our call for the Government to establish a credible dialogue and accept offers of technical assistance to address the worsening human rights situation.

The Human Rights Council has an essential role in bringing states together to address the world's most pressing human rights issues. The UK will continue to play an active role on the Council and to support its efforts to hold those who violate and abuse human rights to account.