

UN Human Rights Council 42 – UK's closing statement

The UN Human Rights Council concluded its 42nd session last Friday, adopting important resolutions on Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Myanmar and Modern Slavery, among many other pressing issues.

The Human Rights Council plays an essential role in protecting and promoting human rights around the globe. The United Kingdom remains committed to working with the Council, and our international partners, to tackle human rights challenges and ensure that those states that violate the rights of their citizens are held accountable.

Following the establishment of civilian-led government in Sudan, I welcome the adoption of a resolution that highlights the importance of human rights throughout Sudan's transition and beyond. Both the renewal of the Independent Expert's mandate, and the commitment to open an Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, demonstrate Sudan's willingness to engage constructively with international partners on human rights. I particularly appreciate the announcement by the Government of Sudan of an independent committee of inquiry into crimes committed during the period of popular protest. The UK will continue to work closely with the Government of Sudan to address ongoing human rights concerns.

I welcome the Council's adoption of the latest Syria resolution. The Council should continue to draw attention to the immense suffering caused by the regime offensive in Idlib, including the impact on children. All parties must return to the agreed ceasefire, act to protect civilians, and abide by international law. The Council has also drawn attention to the impact of human rights violations on refugee return. Regime violations, including arbitrary arrests, forced conscription, and property seizures, obstruct the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees to their homes.

I am pleased at the renewal of the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts for Yemen, although it is disappointing that a single consensus resolution was not possible. The seriousness of the human rights situation makes it vital to give the Group further time to examine the conflict fully and to ensure that their conclusions accurately reflect the conduct of all parties, especially the destabilising role of Iran. We are clear that the only way to end the cycle of violence is through a political settlement, which will enable a legitimate government to protect the human rights of all Yemenis.

I welcome the adoption of the resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. I encourage the authorities to grant UN agencies full access to northern Rakhine and to work with the UN and other partners to create the conditions for safe, voluntary, and dignified returns. The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar will continue to have our full support.

I am pleased the Council adopted the resolution on assistance to Somalia.

Improving human rights in Somalia remains a priority for the UK. The continued technical assistance and monitoring mission provided by the Independent Expert through the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights allows for the critical work of monitoring human rights, and helps to promote and protect human rights in Somalia.

I welcome the renewal of the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, and the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry on Venezuela. We encourage both countries to cooperate fully with their respective Commission of Inquiry.

I was most pleased by the important contribution made by the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Urmila Bhoola, to drive forward action on Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 among others, and her work in spearheading international efforts to eradicate modern slavery. I was delighted that the UK was able to co-sponsor a resolution to renew the Special Rapporteur's mandate. There is an urgent need to build on this momentum if we are to meet the targets set out in SDG 8.7 and implement the commitments of the Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

The work of the Human Rights Council is crucial in bringing states together to protect and promote human rights around the world. As we seek re-election as a member of the Council in 2020, the UK will continue to play an active role to defend and advance human rights and fundamental freedoms, and wholeheartedly support the Council's efforts to hold the perpetrators of human rights violations or abuses to account, wherever these occur.