

UN Human Rights Council 50: UK closing statement

This month we celebrated a milestone – 50 sessions of the Human Rights Council. Sixteen years after its inception, the UK fully believes the Council continues to be the best tool the international community has to address human rights violations and abuses and to advance many of our international goals. As a founding member of the Human Rights Council, the UK remains a strong advocate for the UN's human rights fora and will continue to fully support the Council and the mechanisms at its disposal.

I am appalled by mounting evidence that Russian forces are committing clear violations of international humanitarian law in Ukraine, many amounting to war crimes. I welcome the Human Rights Monitoring Mission and Commission of Inquiry's ongoing efforts to uncover the full extent of Russian atrocities. Russia must cease its illegal war and withdraw its forces from the entirety of Ukraine. I welcome the UK-Gambia led joint statement on food insecurity as a result of Russian aggression in Ukraine, and the EU-led joint statement highlighting the situation of human rights in Russia.

We saw a record 47 signatories to a joint statement led by the Netherlands, which underlined growing international concern at the grave human rights situation in China, including severe restrictions on freedom of religion or belief and the erosion of rights and freedoms in Hong Kong. We continue to urge China to comply with its human rights obligations under international law, and look forward to the early publication of the High Commissioner's report on Xinjiang.

I welcome the Council's adoption of the resolution on women and girls in Afghanistan. The UK will continue to champion the rights of women and girls, who play a vital role in society and economic development. We also call for an immediate end to all human rights violations and abuses in Afghanistan. The Special Rapporteur will play a key role in holding those responsible for violations and abuses to account and we look forward to hearing the findings of his report in September.

I am pleased the Council adopted the UK-led resolution on Syria. This session we took a new approach and focused the text on sexual and gender based violence, which is continually used as a weapon of war. The prevalence of sexual violence in Syria is appalling. It continues to affect women, girls, men, and boys. The Commission of Inquiry has repeatedly documented the rape of women and girls at checkpoints and in detention centres, at the hands of the Asad regime and its allies. This resolution refers to the need for perpetrators to be held to account and support services for survivors.

I am proud that the UK continues to lead efforts to ensure the situation in Sudan remains on the Councils' agenda, and welcome the adoption by consensus – including with the agreement of the Sudanese authorities – of the resolution to commission further reporting from the High Commissioner and UN

Expert on Human Rights in Sudan. The UK remains deeply concerned at the use of violence and killing of peaceful protestors. Continued monitoring and reporting on these serious human rights concerns is vital, and represents an important step in Sudan's path back toward a democratic transition. I hope the Sudanese authorities will continue to cooperate fully with the Council, the High Commissioner and her Expert, to help deliver the peace, justice and full respect for human rights that the Sudanese people call for.

I also welcome the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea, where the human rights situation remains dire. Eritrea's continued refusal to cooperate with the Council or the Special Rapporteur on its human rights record – leading to the resolution being put to a vote – is unacceptable, and I call on the Government of Eritrea to reverse this obstructive policy, and engage fully with the legitimate concerns of the international community on its human rights record, and of its role as a party to the conflict in Northern Ethiopia.

The UK remains unwavering in its commitment to gender equality and women and girls' rights. I am pleased the Council adopted resolutions to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls and the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls. The UK is committed to supporting women and girls everywhere in taking charge of their own bodies, lives and futures. Their right to live free from violence and discrimination, and their choice in whether to get married, start a family, and have a career are fundamental to creating equal and empowered societies and must be upheld.

The UK is immensely proud the Council has renewed the mandate of the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI). The mandate for the Independent Expert remains one of the standout achievements of the Human Rights Council. We thank the UN Independent Expert for the progress that has been achieved and his steadfast commitment and inclusive approach. We are pleased that this important work can continue. Collectively, we have sent the right message: that human rights apply equally to all people, in all places and at all times.

Following the High Commissioner's announcement to step down and not serve another term, I would like to thank her for her leadership and contribution to human rights issues across the globe over the last four years.