

Speech: Lord Ahmad addresses the 39th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

Mr Vice-President, Excellencies. It is an honour to address you today.

I would finally like to express the United Kingdom's gratitude to outgoing High Commissioner Zeid for his commitment and dedication to furthering the cause of human rights during his tenure. We thank him for his principled and considered approach, and his willingness to speak out in defence of human rights around the world.

I would also like to congratulate his successor Michelle Bachelet on her appointment. Michelle's extraordinary wealth of knowledge, and her personal and professional experience, will be invaluable in this role and we wish her every success and look forward to working with her.

Mr President, we deeply regret the decision of the United States to withdraw from the Council. However it should give us all pause to reflect on the challenges this Council faces, and look more closely at the areas where it can and should improve.

Membership is one such area.

Countries standing for the Council are duty bound to uphold the highest standards, and to cooperate with this Council and its mechanisms. We believe that they should be prepared to make campaign pledges, and to discuss their candidacy at open hustings. People look to this Council to defend their rights, guard their freedoms and ensure respect for their dignity.

We all have a responsibility to make this Council work more effectively, to ensure these rights and protections are upheld, for all individuals around the world. This includes identifying where assistance is most needed, and how best to deliver it. We must start this process now, and do it quickly, because around the world human rights remain under threat.

Mr President, I spoke about some of the most serious and pressing issues in this Chamber earlier this year. Sadly many are no less urgent today.

Burma

The conclusions of the UN Fact Finding Mission have provided an authoritative account of crimes committed against the Rohingya community in Burma. The descriptions of atrocities, including murder and rape, make for horrific reading. The report confirms the appalling and systematic oppression of the Rohingya people over a number of years; and highlights patterns of violence and violations elsewhere in the country.

The Rohingya must receive justice for the horrific acts perpetrated against them. There cannot be impunity for these crimes. The Fact Finding Mission concludes that these acts warrant the investigation and prosecution of senior

Burmese officials, to determine their liability for genocide in relation to the situation in Rakhine State.

We commend the Fact Finding Mission for its detailed and comprehensive report. These are the gravest findings that could be placed before this Council. They deserve our full attention, both here and at the Security Council.

The Burmese government must set out how its Commission of Inquiry will investigate these crimes with impartiality, and how those responsible will be held to account through a judicial process.

The UK will continue to focus on ensuring that Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh can voluntarily return to Burma, in safety, in dignity and with international oversight. We will also continue to support a democratic transition in Burma. One that promotes freedom, tolerance and diversity and charts a path towards sustainable peace and prosperity for Burma and all its people. This remains a key priority for our government and the Foreign Secretary will himself be visiting Burma shortly to sustain the momentum for progress.

Syria

In Syria, human rights and international humanitarian law continue to be flouted on a daily basis, with the torture of detainees, bombing of schools and hospitals, and credible reports of chemical weapons attacks. The UK is deeply concerned about the escalating military action by the Syrian regime and its backers in North West Syria, which is putting millions of civilians at risk. The UK calls on the regime and its backers in Russia and Iran to uphold the ceasefire they have previously agreed, and to respect international humanitarian law.

The decision by the Asad regime to name the Syrians who have died in its detention facilities confirms the long held and worst fears of concerned families. It has been rightly highlighted by the Commission of Inquiry and is further proof, from the regime itself, of the brutality that it has inflicted on the Syrian people. The UK also remains concerned about sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, who have been disproportionately victimised since the beginning of the conflict.

Sri Lanka

We welcome the steps taken by the government of Sri Lanka to return land to its people, and to begin the work of the Office on Missing Persons.

We urge them to make more progress in implementing the commitments made to the Council to secure long-term reconciliation. This includes devolution through constitutional reform, and progress on truth-seeking and accountability.

Yemen

The report of the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen further underlined the

deeply concerning human rights situation in Yemen and the importance of reaching a political solution to conflict. We are carefully considering the contents of the report and support the extension of the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts.'

Maldives

The UK continues to urge the government of the Maldives to cease all interference in independent institutions, including the judiciary, Parliament and the Elections Commission. We urge it to guarantee that the Presidential elections later this month are free and fair.

Girls' Education

As the Council heard in June, the UK is committed to ensuring that all girls, everywhere, receive 12 years of quality education. This Council has set a record in bringing together 152 states to make a joint statement on the need to step up efforts to ensure every girl has access to quality education.

This support underlines the strength of our shared desire to achieve this goal by 2030. However, delivering on it will require genuine political commitment and cooperation from all member states.

To address this challenge, the UK will be co-hosting an event during the UN General Assembly later this month to encourage concerted action. I invite you to join us and lend your support.

Conclusion

Mr President, the human rights picture in many parts of the world is bleak, but we should not lose heart. We should recognise the immense value of this Council, and the wider human rights system, and acknowledge their achievements.

Within the last year this Council has, among many other things, convened Special Sessions that have focussed international attention on the desperate situations in Burma and in Syria's Eastern Ghouta; it has also reviewed 42 states under the Universal Periodic Review Process. It is vital that we work together to help states implement their accepted recommendations.

Finally, while it is the duty of this Council to challenge those who violate the rights of their citizens, we should also welcome the progress of those governments committed to change, to making improvements and to engaging constructively with this Council and the mechanisms at its disposal.

We know that for the individuals whose human rights are violated today – and tomorrow, and next week – change cannot come soon enough. It is heart-breaking to see their suffering. But we know that by working together, in this Council, by going step by step, we can bring about lasting change. Change that will relieve suffering, repair trust and restore fundamental rights and freedoms. The United Kingdom is committed to working with this Council to bring about that change.

Thank you Mr President.

News story: Matt Hancock visits China to promote co-operation on healthcare innovation



During his visit, he will co-host the UK-China Health Dialogue in Beijing and attend the World Economic Forum to champion the UK's world-class life sciences sector.

The health and social care secretary will promote his vision for the UK to have the most advanced health-tech sector in the world.

In Beijing, he will meet China's Health Minister Ma Xiaowei to discuss how the UK and China can work together to help patients live longer, healthier and happier lives by harnessing the potential of technology.

The Secretary of State will also attend the World Economic Forum in Tianjin, which he is co-chairing, to highlight the shared interest around innovation in health technology. He will discuss how patients can have access to the best and most cost-effective medicines when he meets with Minister Hu Jinglin from the National Healthcare Security Administration.

Matt Hancock said:

As global leaders, the UK and China must work closely together to tackle key emerging issues in healthcare like the increasing resistance to antibiotics, the issues of an ageing population, and how we can harness the power of technology to help patients live longer, healthier and happier lives.

I want the UK to have the most advanced healthcare system in the world, and this is a great opportunity to champion our world-class life sciences and health-tech sectors.

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[News story: One month until UK hosts](#)

Global Ministerial Mental Health Summit

The first ever Global Ministerial Mental Health Summit will take place in London on 8 and 9 October.

Political figures, experts and policy-makers from around the world will come together at the summit with one common goal: better mental health for all.

The meeting will help countries work together to deal with stigma attached to mental health and address other issues to do with mental ill-health.

Leading voices in health and care are being asked sign a declaration committing to putting mental health on the same footing as physical health. Average global spend on mental health is just 2.8% of government health spending. In the UK that figure is around 9.5%.

Ahead of the summit, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has started a conversation about mental health. The social media campaign asks people what we need to change in how we see and treat mental health. People around the world are being invited to share their views on Twitter or Instagram using the hashtag #TheWorldNeeds.

A number of high-profile mental health campaigners, charities and celebrity ambassadors have already lent their support to the campaign and upcoming summit. Mental health charity Time to Change is set to launch a global film at the event, featuring a Hollywood A-lister.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

It is shocking that 1 in 4 people in the world will be affected by mental ill-health at some point in their lives and around 450 million people are currently living with a diagnosed mental ill-health condition.

For too long we have collectively failed to grasp the true magnitude of the problem. We owe it to everyone to put mental and physical health on an equal footing, to try and eradicate the apathy towards mental health once and for all. I urge policy-makers and leaders to put mental health at the front of their minds.

News story: One month until UK hosts Global Ministerial Mental Health Summit



The first ever Global Ministerial Mental Health Summit will take place in London on 9 and 10 October.

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Published 17 September 2018

Last updated 17 September 2018 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 17 September 2018 Corrected dates of summit to 9 and 10 October.
2. 17 September 2018 First published.