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15 September 2015

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chairman of the United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK) to urge you to give priority to the need for an effective UK strategy towards the United Nations, at a time when the international system is under increasing strain.

This year marks the UN's 70th anniversary. Since 1945, it has had a transformative impact on the world, from the promotion of dialogue between adversaries to multilateral agreements on trade and collective security. For the UK, the development of a rules-based global order has delivered stability and prosperity, serving also to cement the UK in international power structures in a manner that has endured even as the global distribution of power has changed.

The breakdown of this system would have serious consequences for the UK, in terms of its security, ability to trade and international standing. Our long period of global peace will not endure unless governments consciously will it to last. Political leadership, however, too often remains trapped in national agendas. International compromises, of the kind that made the UN possible in 1945, still appear too costly when measured by the familiar criterion of national interest and we are now witnessing the fading effect of the UN's guiding principles in restraining nationalistic ambitions.

By any objective measure, the UK remains one of the most powerful states at the UN. Its capacity to lead, its convening power and multilateral skill are well-suited to the modern political environment and it will be some time before emerging powers are able – or willing – to match it. The UK therefore has an important role to play in restoring communications between big powers, in forging diplomatic compromises and in championing practical solutions.

With this in mind, UNA-UK has led a number of initiatives over the past year to encourage greater UK engagement with the UN system. We believe the UN should have a prominent place in the Government's new National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). These policy pronouncements should articulate a strategy that acknowledges the link between the health of the UN system and the UK's security and prosperity.

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) has a particularly important role in providing leadership on these issues within Government. Our recent reports (shared with your teams in the Multilateral Policy Directorate and the Conflict Department) set out specific opportunities for UK action that would support this, focussing on areas where the UK could and should play a stronger role: UN peacekeeping, atrocity prevention and multilateral nuclear disarmament.

The main recommendations for your department are summarised below.

Recommendations to the FCO on national security strategy

- The FCO should advocate a national security strategy that is focussed on current and emerging risks and places emphasis on addressing the underlying drivers of instability.
- The Government should build on the SDSR consultation by initiating opportunities for public debate, particularly with the younger generation, on foreign policy issues.

Recommendations to the FCO on UN peace operations

- The UK should set out a clear rationale for participating in UN peacekeeping, as a framework for strategic deployments to operations that are collectively funded, UN-authorized and address potential risks to the UK. These considerations should inform how the UK engages with the US-led High Level Summit on Peace Operations later this month.

- The FCO should ensure that the forthcoming SDSR includes a coherent approach that spans the UK's work on the Security Council, at UN Headquarters and in the field in UN Missions, and commits to strengthening UN operations by increasing contributions of military, police and civilian personnel.
- As the lead department on peacekeeping, the FCO should work with the Ministry of Defence to cultivate a culture change in the way in which the UN is viewed internally, making it a desirable, career-enhancing activity and fostering institutional knowledge.

Recommendations to the FCO on atrocity prevention and the responsibility to protect

- The UK should state that the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity – which can destabilise countries and regions and lead to conflict, displacement and extremism – is in its national interest and a foreign policy objective.
- The FCO should define the role of the R2P Focal Point and ensure this position is adequately resourced and politically supported to inform international and domestic understanding of atrocity prevention.
- The FCO should set out how the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict initiative relates to the UK's wider efforts to prevent atrocity crimes.
- The FCO should undertake a review of the UK's ability to prevent atrocities, which should investigate how to:
 - Improve its early warning frameworks to take account of the specific characteristics of atrocity crimes;
 - Ensure that those implementing programmes on upstream prevention have the support, capacity and expertise to identify and tackle the root causes of atrocity crimes; and
 - Ensure that the Government's response to international military crises and extremist groups acknowledges the need to prevent atrocities and protect groups at risk before, during and after conflict.

Recommendations to the FCO on multilateral nuclear disarmament

- The FCO should continue and increase efforts to promote dialogue on the hardest security issues, including multilateral nuclear disarmament.
- The FCO should support the Government in making progress on its international obligation to disarm under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, including by:
 - Expanding the scope of diplomatic dialogue within the 'P5 process';
 - Fostering dialogue between nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapons states, including by increasing engagement with the 'humanitarian consequences' movement;
 - Increasing diplomatic efforts to make progress on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty and Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty;
 - Supporting the setting out of a clear rationale for the UK's nuclear programme and posture, and committing to review it regularly; and
 - Developing parallel strategies for managing any threats identified as relevant to the UK's nuclear weapons capability through complementary non-nuclear means.

The UK must use its resources to strengthen the rules-based international order on which global stability and our own security and prosperity depend. By investing in UN initiatives, the UK can address national and global challenges that affect the everyday lives of people in this country and beyond, while maintaining its position in the international system. Doing so would be the most appropriate way in which the UK can mark the 70th anniversary of our global organisation.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Jeremy Greenstock
Chairman, UNA-UK