



Foreign &
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Sir Jeremy Greenstock
Chairman,
United Nations Association – U
3 Whitehall Court
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22nd.
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Dear Sir Jeremy,

Thank you for your letter of 23 January to the Foreign Secretary about the ability of the UN Security Council to deal effectively with crises. I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with the United Nations.

I share your view that we should do everything we can to ensure that the Security Council can react swiftly and imaginatively to deal with crises. I believe it has done so on a number of issues in the past year: Mali, the Central African Republic and South Sudan among others. Of course the veto by Russia and China against successive draft Resolutions on Syria did deal a blow to the image of the Security Council as a body able to react to one of the worst conflicts of modern times. And I share your concern about the dire humanitarian situation. But, you will note that the Security Council did pass an important Resolution on Syrian chemical weapons, serving not only to significantly alter the course of the conflict for the better but setting a new precedent as the first ever Security Council Resolution binding all UN member states to refrain from using chemical weapons in either national or international conflict. The Security Council has also agreed a Presidential Statement on humanitarian assistance as well as provided regional support and guidance to Special Representative of the Security General (SRSG) Brahimi and convened the Geneva negotiations. It would be wrong to conclude that the Security Council is not acting.

Despite the veto of Resolutions on Syria, I believe that any proposal to change the veto must be analysed very carefully. The French proposal for a code of conduct

whereby the permanent five Security Council members refrain from exercising their veto right in situations of mass atrocity is an important contribution to the debate on Security Council reform. You will be aware that the UK has not exercised its veto since 1989 and cannot foresee doing so when the Security Council seeks to resolve situations the proposal envisages. But any proposal for reform must be assessed against whether it furthers the Council's efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate. Therefore any changes to the veto need to be approached with caution. And there are other considerations to be addressed: for example the possibility that others would seek to propose a solution to a situation of mass atrocity that we could not possibly support and felt we needed to veto, without being able reasonably to rely on vital national interests.

Moreover, it is precisely to avoid the risks that you raise – the UN becoming less able to respond to crises and its international standing as an arbiter of legitimacy – that it is imperative to keep the world's most powerful nations engaged in the UN. The veto right is an important element to this. The veto also prevents more influential states from using the UN for purely national interests or from playing out disputes with each other on a worldwide scale.

The Government is committed to ensuring that the Security Council remains a positive and effective force in the maintenance of international peace and security. And I am grateful to the United Nations Association for continuing to engage with the Government on this and other UN issues, as well as for its advocacy of the UN with the wider public.

Best wishes

Sajeeda

**THE RT. HON. BARONESS WARSI PC
SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE**