Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary and UN Special Envoy urge UN to tackle sexual violence in conflict

2013-06-24

Foreign Secretary William Hague and UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie took their campaign to end warzone rape and sexual violence in conflict to the UN Security Council today. They urged those at the meeting in New York, to adopt a draft resolution strengthening the mechanisms across the UN system that can help tackle rape in war, and encouraged UN Member States to take steps at the national level to end this scourge.

The UN Security Council debate led to a unanimous vote for the new

Security Council Resolution on ending rape and sexual violence in war

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Foreign Secretary William Hague and UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie delivered the following remarks.

The Foreign Secretary William Hague said:

(Check against delivery)

I thank the Secretary General and my fellow Ministers for attending this debate.

I pay tribute to Zainab Bangura, for the energy, determination and vision she has brought to her role; to Angelina Jolie; for her inspirational work on behalf of the world’s refugees and for campaigning with me to end rape and sexual violence in conflict; and to Jane Adong Anywar, for her courageous work and powerful testimony.

In conflicts in nearly every corner of the globe, rape is used systematically and ruthlessly, in the almost certain knowledge that there will be no consequences for the perpetrators.

If the international community does not address this culture of impunity, millions more women, children and men could well be subjected to the same, appalling treatment - now and in the conflicts of the future.

The lead we set and the action we take therefore has the potential to save lives and change the course of events around the world – and nothing less than that should be our ambition.

As an international community we curbed the development of nuclear weapons, heading off a once threatened and unstoppable wave of insecurity. We have binding Conventions against the use of torture, and on the treatment of prisoners. We have outlawed the use of chemical weapons, and imposed a global ban on cluster munitions. We have made progress in choking off the trade in conflict diamonds that undermines many fragile countries. Here in the Security Council we adopted historic Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. And this year we agreed a historic Arms Trade Treaty, to stem the illegal arms trade that exacerbates conflict and causes such human misery.

No country could tackle these vast global problems alone, and we have shown that we can confront them together.

Today we face another burning need to unite to improve the condition of humanity, together:

It is time to say that rape and sexual violence used as a weapon of war is unacceptable, that we know it can be prevented, and that we will act now to eradicate it: shouldering our responsibilities as national governments, and collectively as the United Nations Security Council.

Sexual violence is used to destroy lives, tear apart communities and achieve military objectives, in just the same way that tanks and bullets are.

Like others here I have witnessed the terrible life sentence of trauma and illness inflicted on victims, and the devastating impact on their families and communities.

I am appalled that the vast majority of survivors never receive justice, support or recognition despite years and even decades of waiting, and that it is victims, not the perpetrators, who still bear the shame and stigma.

I have also seen the devastating impact that sexual violence has on prospects for peace and reconciliation, undermining our efforts as a Security Council to advance peace negotiations and agreements.

We have seen the world over that unresolved grievances fuel further cycles of violence and conflict. Where there is no justice or dignity the seeds of future violence are sown. So a new consciousness of this issue and strong action to protect women and children must run throughout all the Security Council’s peace-building efforts.

I pay tribute to the organisations and individuals who have worked for years so that the world knows and understands the scale of rape and sexual violence in conflict, and have helped persuade Governments to take it seriously as many of us are now doing. And I applaud the local organisations who are on the frontline of efforts to support survivors and achieve accountability, who need our active support and assistance.

Their efforts, allied with new attention from governments and efforts by the United Nations, mean that we are at last poised to be able to make unprecedented and historic progress on confronting warzone rape and sexual violence.

We have a choice as an international community. We can grasp the opportunity to shatter the culture of impunity once and for all, or we can let it slip away, and with it the hopes of survivors and vulnerable women, children and men worldwide.

We have made important progress. In London in April G8 member states pledged to address sexual violence in conflict as a threat to global peace and security. I am grateful for the commitments they joined the United Kingdom in making, and the work that is already flowing from that agreement.

For example, the UK is now taking the lead in developing a new International Protocol on the Investigation and Documentation of rape and sexual violence in conflict, working with experts from all over the world. Its aim is to increase the number of successful prosecutions, by setting out practical standards for the investigation and documentation of these crimes: so that the strongest possible evidence is collected, and survivors are cared for sensitively.

We have also set up a team of over 70 UK experts including doctors, forensic scientists, police and gender experts, which can be deployed to reinforce UN and national efforts. It has already been deployed in Bosnia, to the Syrian border, and to Libya, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Later this year we will carry out further deployments to support Syrian survivors, and will return to Bosnia, Mali and the DRC.

We are determined to continue and build on these efforts as the United Kingdom, and to build new partnerships with countries also working in this area.

But we need global action if we are to shatter the culture of impunity.

That is why I put this issue at the heart of the United Kingdom’s Security Council Presidency this month, and why I also intend to convene a global gathering during the UN General Assembly in September.

The Resolution we will adopt today sends a powerful signal to the world of leadership from the Security Council:

It recognises the commitments in the G8 declaration, which will add to the international momentum, which has begun to gather but which must now become unstoppable.

It recognises the responsibility of national governments to uphold human rights and the rule of law in their countries, and it will expand the tools available to Mrs Bangura to work with them; notably the DRC and Somalia who have shown great courage in signing joint

communiqués with the UN recognising the existence of sexual violence in their countries and pledging to address it.

The Resolution also recognises that effective investigation and documentation of sexual violence in armed conflict is vital to bringing perpetrators to justice and ensuring recourse to justice for survivors, and I hope the new International Protocol will be able to make a difference in this area.

I hope that there will also be new commitments by countries around the world support the deployment of professionals with expertise to help build up the judicial, investigative and legal capacity of states.

These and other steps in the Resolution, if fully implemented, will represent vital new advances in how we tackle rape and sexual violence in conflict.

But it is only a beginning.

We need action on all fronts – from the Security Council and the United Nations as a whole, and from governments in conflict-affected countries.

We need to begin to demolish impunity, to create a new culture of deterrence – and at the same time focus on long-term care and support for survivors.

We need to hone in on the lack of accountability as one of the root causes for rape and sexual violence in conflict – but at the same time not forget that women's political, social and economic empowerment across all societies is essential, and that our goal must be full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

We need the Security Council to show the determined leadership I have been calling for – but at the same time must listen to, involve and support local organisations working on the frontline. Indeed I strongly support the development of a network of regional champions to support their efforts.

And of course all our countries must do more to address violence against women in all its forms, and not just in conflict situations.

We can and must do all these things, but must never lose sight of our overriding objective:

To consign the use of rape as a weapon of war to the pages of history.

And I believe that has to begin, above all, with a focus on ending impunity, and by bringing to bear the weight, authority and leadership of the United Nations Security Council.

Building on today's debate, I have new hope that this will at last be possible.

UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie said:

(Check against delivery)

Mr President, Secretary General, Foreign Ministers; it is an honour to address this Council; and I thank Foreign Secretary Hague for the United Kingdom's leadership.

The Security Council was established 67 years ago, and has witnessed 67 years of wars and conflict.

But the Security Council has yet to take up warzone rape as a serious priority.

Hundreds of thousands - if not millions - of women, children and men have been raped in conflicts in our lifetimes.

The numbers are so vast, and the subject so painful that we have to stop to remember that behind each number is someone with a name, a personality, a story, and dreams no different from ours and those of our children.

Let us be clear what we are speaking of:

Young girls raped and impregnated before their bodies are able to carry a child, causing fistula.

Boys held at gunpoint and forced to sexually assault their mothers and sisters.

Women raped with bottles, wood branches and knives to cause as much damage as possible.

Toddlers and even babies dragged from their homes, and violated.

I will never forget the survivors that I have met, or what they told me:

The mother in Goma whose five year old daughter had been raped right outside a police station; in plain view.

Or the woman who I met Syria last week, who asked I hide her name and face; because she knew if she spoke out about the crimes committed against her, she would be attacked again - and possibly killed.

Rape is a tool of war. It is an act of aggression, and a crime against humanity.

It is inflicted intentionally to destroy the woman, the family and the community.

It ruins lives and fuels conflict.

The United Nations Charter is clear:

You, the Security Council, have “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security”.

Rape as a weapon of war is an assault on security.

And the world in which these crimes happens is one in which there is not and never will be peace.

Addressing warzone sexual violence is therefore your responsibility, as well as the duty of governments in countries afflicted by it.

The fact is that in many conflict situations there is no government to take responsibility. So there is no protection and no accountability.

When governments cannot act, the UN Security Council must step in to provide leadership and assistance.

For these crimes happen not because they are inherent to war, but because the global climate allows it.

That five year old girl was raped because her attacker knew he would get away with it.

And because the world has not treated this as a priority, there have only been a handful of prosecutions for hundreds of thousands of survivors.

They suffer most at the hands of their rapists, but they are also victims of this culture of impunity.

That is the sad, upsetting and indeed shameful reality.

I understand that there are many things that are difficult for the UN Security Council to agree on.

But sexual violence in conflict should not be one of them.

That it is a crime to rape young children is not something I imagine anyone in this room would not be able to agree on.

The rights and wrongs of this issue are straightforward; and the actions that need to be taken have been identified.

What is needed is political will, and that is what is being asked of your countries today:

To act on the knowledge of what is right and what is unjust; and to show the determination to do something about it.

Every country in the world is affected by sexual violence in one form or another, from domestic abuse to female genital mutilation.

So all countries have a responsibility to step forward.

But the starting point must be you, the UN Security Council, shouldering your responsibilities and showing leadership.

To women in refugee camps, or those struggling to survive in war-torn communities, there is no greater power in the world that can stand by them.

That young Syrian rape victim is here, because you represent her.

That five year old child in the Congo must count, because you represent her.

And in her eyes, if her attacker gets away with his crimes, it is because you have allowed it.

You set the bar. If the United Nations Security Council sets rape and sexual violence in conflict as a priority it will become one and progress will be made.

If you do not, this horror will continue.

I thank and encourage those countries that are already setting a powerful example.

My plea to all of you is to adopt and implement the Resolution before you; So that perpetrators are finally held to account, and survivors can at last feel safer on the ground.

And please, do not let this issue fall when you leave this chamber: Meet your commitments, debate this issue in your parliaments, mobilise people in your countries, and build it into all your foreign policy efforts; so that together you can turn the tide of global opinion, shatter impunity and finally put an end this abhorrence.

Thank you.

Further information

Read

UN Security Council Resolution 2106

Watch a

video of the Foreign Secretary speaking to media

before the debate

Read

remarks made by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

Read more about the

Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative

More information on the

Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative at our tumblr

Read the G8 Declaration on

Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

Find out more about the

UK’s work to support women and girls around the world

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Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-and-un-special-envoy-to-urge-un-to-tackle-sexual-violence-in-conflict