Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Launch of the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

2014-06-12

Remarks by Foreign Secretary William Hague

I am delighted to be here today with my colleagues the Secretary of State for Defence Philip Hammond and the Secretary of State for International Development Justine Greening for the launch of the UK's third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

This is a vital opportunity for us to reaffirm our commitment to building on the achievements of this Summit for years to come, reduce the terrible impact of conflict on women and girls and ensure they can play their rightful part in ending wars and bringing lasting peace.

These goals are inextricably linked:

Women's participation in peace processes helps ensure that sexual violence and other issues that disproportionately affect women and girls are given the attention they deserve;

And in return, by tackling sexual violence in conflict we are removing a crushing weight from women's lives across the world, accelerating a change of attitude towards women in many other settings and taking an important step towards what I keep saying is the great strategic prize of the 21st Century, which is the full attainment of political, social and economic rights for women. I am committed to achieving this.

This matters to our diplomatic, defence and development activities not just because it is a moral obligation, but because it is so clearly essential to our shared objective of promoting peace, security and prosperity around the world.

No solution to a conflict can be sustainable or lasting if it ignores the needs, experience and interests of half a country's population.

Yet since the end of the Cold War, women have made up just 4% of the signatories to peace agreements, less than 3% of mediators, and less than 10% of those sitting around the negotiating table.

But pressure for change is really building:

The UK was one of the first countries in the world to launch a National Action Plan [on Women, Peace and Security] in 2006, we are now joined by many more countries with more soon to follow;

We have helped pass seven UN Security Council Resolutions specifically on these issues, including resolution 2106 on sexual violence in conflict which was adopted when I chaired a session of the Security Council last year – these are having a practical impact through UN peacekeeping missions;

And we are also seeing some inspiring examples around the world of women's active participation in peace processes.

I am delighted that that you will have the chance to hear shortly from Secretary Deles who played a vital part in the successful Mindanao peace process in the Philippines, Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng who has huge expertise to share from her role in the Juba peace talks, and from Sabah Alhallak who has helped lead the way in making Syrian women's voices heard.

Syria is one of the six focus countries in this National Action Plan, and we are determined that when the Syrian peace process restarts and transition begins, there must be full participation for women.

I met Syrian women activists during the Geneva II peace talks and wrote to the UN Secretary General and Ministers across the world, urging their involvement, and the UK continues to support discussions and training so that women's groups and civil society have their views represented.

This is essential for there to be an inclusive and durable peace in Syria, and to start to mend the damage that Assad's brutal war has done to women's rights in particular.

Not just in Syria, but in the other five focus countries – Afghanistan, Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya and Somalia – and across the world, the United Kingdom is committed for the long-term to reducing the terrible impact of conflict on women and to supporting them in bringing peace and stability.

So, I hope this Summit as a whole will create the unstoppable momentum that will end sexual violence in conflict, but that it will also instil in the minds of policy makers from all over the world that without the active and equal participation of women no country can be truly democratic, stable or secure.

That is what we dedicate ourselves to in the British Government.

Remarks by Secretary of State for Defence Philip Hammond

I am delighted to join the Foreign Secretary and Development Secretary today for the launch of the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

I echo the words of the Foreign Secretary - this is a vital opportunity to reaffirm our long-term commitment to reducing the terrible impact of conflict on women and girls around the world….

And I pay tribute to his leadership, and that of the UN Special Envoy, in driving forward this agenda.

The fact we are joined here today by the experts on the panel, and by representatives from countries and continents across the world is a reflection of an increasing consensus that all nations must adopt a zero-tolerance policy on the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

Using the reputation of UK military as leverage

The Foreign Secretary has already set out how the UK government is determined to lead from the front on combating sexual violence in conflict. PSVI is a personal passion of his and the agenda has been driven this far by that personal passion.

And UK Defence has a critical part to play.

Respect for human rights and the protection of civilians has been a core part of the training and conduct of our Armed Forces for decades…

inculcated into every single soldier from the most senior commander to the rawest recruit.

And whether our troops are on operations in theatre, on a training mission, or enjoying themselves off-duty, they know the highest standards of conduct will be expected of them.

And it is because of those higher standards of conduct – and the fact that the British Armed Forces are regarded as some of the finest in the world….

…that the training they deliver to foreign forces, including in the vital areas of the Law of Armed Conflict and international humanitarian law, is received with such respect on the ground around the world.

So we are determined to use that powerful leverage to contribute to the battle to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

This year, for example, we initiated a new training course – based at the Peace Support Operations Training Centre in Sarajevo – to further increase awareness and understanding of sexual violence in conflict.

We are also applying the principles of Prevention of Sexual Violence (psv) in our approach to capacity building on the ground.

Working in collaboration with both the FCO and DfID through the Stabilisation Unit to put women at the heart of the rebuilding process in their countries.

In Afghanistan, in particular,

…we have deployed Female Engagement Teams

…And we have helped double the numbers of female recruits in the Afghan National Police…

The UK is leading the coalition support to the Afghanistan National Army Officer Academy just outside Kabul, which will have up to 30 female cadets in each intake. The first female platoon (balook) is due to start training on Saturday. Do not underestimate the earth shattering significance of training female officers alongside their male counterparts in Afghanistan.

The UK National Action Plan, published today, is a further evolution of our approach.

It is about consciously using our leverage to tackle the scourge of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

Firstly, by incorporating it into their pre-deployment training, we will increase awareness within UK Armed Forces that sexual violence maybe used as a weapon in conflict.

And we are actively seeking UN and NATO accreditation for our groundbreaking course in Sarajevo.

We want it to be part of all the peacekeeper training we deliver to all our overseas Armed Forces by next year.

Secondly, we are working collectively to embed the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 right across the board.

So we are revising NATO doctrines on Stabilisation and Reconstruction… and on Crisis Response Operations and Peace Support Operations… to highlight the specific issues facing women and children in conflict.

In addition, we are encouraging the employment of specialist advisers in NATO HQs.

And actively supporting the relevant NATO committee through our Deputy Chair – a UK Lt Col.

All nations must play their part in stamping out the use of sexual violence in conflict.

That is why we are all here today.

The UK Armed Forces are doing their bit – and are ready to do more.

Only by working together can we send the strongest of signals to all those who desire to partner or train with us

…That respect for human rights is not an optional extra

…But a non-negotiable core part of the package that sits at the heart of every UK-delivered programme…

…And is woven into the fabric of every UK-led operation.

Thank you.

Remarks by the Secretary of State for International Development Justine Greening

I'm delighted to be able to speak here today.

As you've just heard from the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary, the National Action Plan we are launching today puts women and girls at the centre of cross-government efforts to prevent, resolve and respond to conflict.

It draws together our security, foreign policy and development work and provides a real vision for Government and our partners, for meeting the needs of women and girls in fragile and conflict affected states.

And I want to thank all of the people who have worked so hard to bring this plan together. I believe it has the potential to change the lives of generations of girls and women around the world and can also build a far more peaceful world for all of us.

We have been hearing throughout this summit of the devastating effect that conflict has on women and girls and how it affects them in particular ways.

It's well documented how sexual violence against women becomes another weapon of war in armed conflicts…

And this violence spills over into societies post-conflict to make women and girls vulnerable to violence and abuse in their own homes and communities.

Because women are traditionally carers, the loss of breadwinners and the destruction of their homes during conflict takes a particularly heavy financial toll, as well as an emotional toll.

Women and girls also face particular barriers and discrimination to getting jobs, training, capital, services, credit and land in a post-conflict world.

And sexual exploitation, trafficking and early and forced marriage invariably increases as a result of displacement and economic hardship.

The result is that women and girls fall more deeply into the poverty they knew before the war began.

This is a bleak picture but take a look at what happens when you do invest in girls and women and prioritise their needs.

We know that gender equality has been linked to improved economic and development outcomes for countries…to more rapid recovery and poverty reduction post-conflict. And it has also been correlated with lower levels of violence and less likelihood of intra- and interstate conflict.

Quite simply when you invest in girls and women a far brighter picture emerges for them and their countries.

And yet, despite commitments made at the UN Security Council through resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, we know that women continue to be excluded from peace negotiations and other key political processes post-conflict.

This has to change. Without gender equality we will not have sustainable peace. Girls and women have a critical role to play in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction and development.

That is why, as you've heard today - empowering women and girls and ensuring that they are able to take part in the social, economic, political and civil processes that affect them is a core part of the UK's ambition to build a sustainable, positive peace in the countries where we work.

My Department plays a critical role in this. No country can truly develop if it leaves half its population behind and DFID puts girls and women at the heart of everything that we do.

We are helping women around the world get access to education, financial services, health services and family planning.

We are also giving girls and women a voice in their communities by helping more women to build networks and political know-how, to vote – as in Afghanistan - and to ensure equal legal rights and greater access to justice.

And we are scaling up our work on preventable violence against girls and women. For example in Afghanistan we recently announced a new £18.5 million fund to help women get access to justice and raise public awareness of women's rights.

The new three-year National Action Plan pulls all of this work together, alongside the work of the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence.

And ensures we have a comprehensive, cross-Government approach to meeting the specific needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict states and that takes into account gender differences and the different challenges and opportunities faced by women and girls.

It will also provide the cross-government framework to take forward the actions we have identified at this Summit.

I look forward to working with my colleagues over the next three years to put this plan into action…

All of it will - bit by bit – help to bring about change for the better.

By working together I believe we can ensure a better future for girls and women and in doing so we can ensure a better, more peaceful future for their countries too, and for all of us.

UK National Action Plan on women, peace and security

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There are several ways you can keep up-to-date with developments at the summit:

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and via the hashtag

#TimeToAct

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