Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

G8 Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

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Foreign Secretary William Hague, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura and Special Envoy of UN High Commissioner for Refugees Angelina Jolie spoke at the launch of the

G8 Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

in London today. This is a transcript of their comments.

The Foreign Secretary, William Hague said:

Foreign Ministers, Colleagues, Your Excellencies, Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen; Welcome to Lancaster House, where the G8 Foreign Ministers are meeting today.

We have had intense discussions about Syria, North Korea, Iran and North Africa, as you would expect. But this event, that you are part of, is about something different.

The G8 represents some of the world’s largest economies and most powerful nations. It includes, for example, four of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. We have the ability to show leadership on vast global issues of our time. One of those issues must be the horrific use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war in conflicts around the globe.

This is one of the greatest and most persistent injustices in the world. It is also one of the most neglected.

We know that tens of thousands of women were raped in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s, hundreds of thousands in Rwanda’s genocide, and up to a quarter of a million in the Democratic Republic of Congo over the last decade.

We know that a huge number of the victims of sexual violence are children: often very young children and sometimes babies.

We know that this violence inflicts unimaginable suffering, destroys families and communities, and fuels conflict.

Yet the overwhelming majority of survivors never see any justice for what they have endured. And there has never been any concerted international effort, supported by leading nations of the world, to eradicate sexual violence in conflict in the first place. This has to change. To my mind, this cause is the slave trade of our generation.

I know that this is a difficult and painful subject, and that people tend to shy away from talking about it. Victims of sexual violence labour under a wholly unjust and deeply engrained stigma which we must lift from them.

I often hear the mistaken view that rape is something that simply happens in war, or even worse, a cultural phenomenon. And I know that to some people this seems like a faraway problem – even though rape camps were set up on European soil in our lifetimes, and even though we live with accounts of survivors and statistics about these crimes at our very fingertips.

The moment has come to shatter the myths about sexual violence.

Our goal must be a world in which it is inconceivable that thousands of women, children and men can be raped in the course of a conflict – because an international framework of deterrence and accountability makes it impossible.

That is why I put this issue on the agenda of the G8 a year ago, and asked my fellow Foreign Ministers to work with me in this endeavour: so that Governments finally do more to confront this problem, not just the many brave groups and individuals working on the ground.

And so I am delighted to announce that today we have reached a historic agreement as G8 Foreign Ministers: pledging to work together to end sexual violence in conflict. It is an honour to present to you the Declaration that we have just adopted, and the practical action that will now flow from it. It is a privilege to do so with two inspirational international figures, Zainab Bangura and Angelina Jolie.

Zainab Bangura is the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on sexual violence in conflict, a role she carries out with great determination and passion and I am very glad to be working extremely closely with her.

Angelina Jolie has worked with me every step of the way in developing the initiative that has led to this G8 Declaration. I am very grateful to her, particularly for all the experience she brings as Special Envoy of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

In a moment I will invite them both to speak. But before I do, I wish to set out briefly what the G8 have agreed today:

First, we have made a historic declaration that rape and serious sexual violence in conflict are grave breaches of the Geneva Convention, as well as war crimes. This gives us the

responsibility actively to search for, prosecute or hand over for trial anyone accused of these crimes, regardless of their nationality, wherever they are in the world. We need to shrink, and then to eradicate, safe havens for those responsible for warzone rape, and this is a step towards doing that.

Second, we have committed ourselves to the development of a comprehensive International Protocol on the Investigation and Documentation of rape and sexual violence in conflict. The UK will take the lead in developing this Protocol with experts from all over the world this year. It will set out ideal international standards for the investigation of rape and sexual violence, to ensure that the strongest possible evidence is collected, that survivors receive sensitive, and sustained, support, so there is a basis to increase the number of successful prosecutions.

Third, we have declared that there should never be any amnesty for sexual violence in peace agreements, and committed ourselves to ensuring explicit recognition of the need for accountability for sexual violence in any peace agreements that G8 nations are involved in. We need such commitments to end the treatment of rape and sexual violence as a secondary issue, and to put women and women's rights front and centre in conflict resolution.

Fourth, we have promised to review the doctrine and training we provide to our own national military and police. We will ensure that those we deploy to warzones are trained on responding to sexual violence in conflict. We will also ensure that this is reflected in training we give to peacekeeping troops of other nations. This is an absolutely essential step, since members of armed forces are often the first to come into contact with survivors, and could also have an important role to play in helping to change male attitudes.

Fifth, we have declared our support for the deployment of international experts to help build up the judicial, investigative and legal capacity of other countries in this area. It is vital that all countries make an effort to build up the pool of expertise available to the UN to combat sexual violence. The UK has already set up a team of over 70 experts including doctors, forensic scientists, police and gender experts. In its first six months it has been deployed to Bosnia, the Syrian border and to Libya. Later this year we will carry out further deployments to the borders of Syria, and to Bosnia, South Sudan, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo. We are also in discussions with the Government of Somalia about helping their efforts.

Sixth, we have called for increased funding for international prevention and response efforts. We need to increase the resources available globally to combat sexual violence in conflict.

So I am delighted that a number of my G8 colleagues are in a position to announce new funding immediately, they've confirmed that in our meeting today. This amounts to nearly $35.5 million or £23 million.

It includes over £10 million from the United Kingdom: £5million from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to support grassroots and human rights projects on sexual violence against women and girls and wider projects on violence against women and girls. The other £5million is from the Department for International Development, to look at what drives violence against women and girls in conflict settings. And I thank my colleague Justine Greening, Secretary of State for International Development, for her commitment to this issue. I am also pleased to announce £150,000 in UK funding for the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict.

Finally, the Declaration emphasises that protection efforts against sexual violence should be included in the first phase of all responses to conflict and humanitarian emergencies. And it includes vital commitments on women and children's rights, the protection of women human rights defenders, and the need for a comprehensive approach to health, psychological, legal and economic support for survivors of sexual violence.

I am very grateful to my colleague, the German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, for raising at this meeting the need to review progress against these commitments during future G8 Presidencies, such as the German Presidency in two years time.

This Declaration is important but only a beginning. We now need many more countries to join us.

So when the UK holds the Presidency of the UN Security Council in June, I will travel there to lead a debate on this issue, and it will also be one of my top priorities for the UN General Assembly in September.

Now that we have put warzone rape on the international agenda, it must never slip off it again and it must be given even greater prominence.

Ladies and Gentlemen, ending the 17th century slave trade was deemed impossible, and it was eradicated. Achieving global action against landmines, cluster munitions and climate change was thought impossible, yet the world acts on these issues. Only two weeks ago we secured an International Arms Trade Treaty, one that many people thought could never be adopted.

Today we know the facts about sexual violence in conflict, and we have the means to address it. So we in Britain will not look away or rest until the world faces up to its responsibilities to eradicate this violence. This Declaration is a milestone in that effort, and a turning point in our collective history.

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura said:

Foreign Ministers, Excellencies, Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen, today we join hands and lift our voices in unison, breaking silence on history's oldest and least condemned crime – sexual violence used as a weapon of war.

In so doing, we stand in solidarity with the many thousands of victims and survivors around the world. To say to them that they are not forgotten, that their plight is of the highest priority, at the highest level.

That this conversation takes place here, in the G8 circle of some of the most influential nations, represents remarkable progress towards eradicating this crime.

Your Declaration today further affirms our conviction that sexual violence in conflict is a fundamental threat to international peace and security, and as such requires an operational and strategic security and justice response.

The United Nations Security Council has led the way in the past three years, ushering in a paradigm shift that has fundamentally altered our approach to dealing with this scourge.

Thus, even as we concentrate on our obligations to the survivors of sexual violence – the critical health, psycho-social, legal and other services that they must have to rebuild their lives – we now also throw a more concerted spotlight on the perpetrators. All those who commit, or command, or condone sexual violence in conflict.

The personal leadership of the United Nations Secretary-General, the focus of the Security Council, and the commitment of the G8 as expressed in this Declaration, is an unequivocal signal of intent: sexual violence in conflict will not be tolerated, and the full force of international order will be brought to bear to ensure accountability for such crimes.

For the perpetrators, there can be no hiding place; no amnesty; no safe harbour. They will be pursued by any and all means at our collective disposal. In the process, we will begin to transfer the stigma of this crime from the victims, to the perpetrators.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I come here today en route from my first visits to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. In Mogadishu, I spoke to Luul Ali Osman who, 3 months ago, faced the terrible weight of censure, arrest and imprisonment for daring to speak out about her rape by security forces in an internally displaced persons camp. But in the past months our collective efforts have freed Luul, and those who dared to speak out for her cause.

And three days ago, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud speaking to military cadets in Mogadishu, declared that security forces who rape the citizens of Somalia will be fought and defeated like any enemy of the state.

I commend the President and his Government for their resolve, and anticipate another important step in preventing sexual violence in Somalia when the international community convenes for the Somalia Donor Conference here in London in a few weeks time.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, I visited the community where last year 11 babies, between the ages of 6 and 12 months old, were raped. Faced with such horror, we are compelled to turn the despair in our hearts into unshakable resolve that this will not happen to our children.

A resolve to match the ruthlessness of those who would commit such unthinkable crimes, with our own relentless and unwavering pursuit of accountability, and ultimately deterrence and prevention.

The firm commitment that was made so personally to me by President Kabila to more effectively prosecute crimes of sexual violence is absolutely crucial, and together we must hold the President to his word. At the same time, we must support him and his Government – technically and financially – to deal decisively with this problem.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, today, the Declaration of the G8 represents a beacon of light and hope for Luul Ali Osman, the many devastated communities in Congo, and the countless other survivors in conflicts around the world.

We have an opportunity like at no time before in history to break the back of this age-old evil. Sexual violence in conflict is not inevitable; to eradicate it is not a ‘mission impossible’. May this be a decisive moment; our moment to put an end to this crime which is a blight on our collective humanity.

Thank you.

UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie said:

Foreign Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen, hundreds of thousands of women and children have been sexually assaulted, tortured, or forced into sexual slavery in the wars of our generation. Time and again the world has failed to prevent this abuse, or to hold attackers accountable.

Rape has been treated as something that simply happens in war; perpetrators have learnt that they can get away with it; and victims have been denied justice. But wartime rape is not inevitable. This violence can be prevented, and it must be confronted.

There are many individuals and NGOs who have worked tirelessly to address these crimes for years. But the international political will has been sorely lacking. I have heard survivors of rape from Bosnia to the Democratic Republic of Congo say that they feel the world simply does not care about them. And who could blame them?

For too long they have been the forgotten victims of war: responsible for none of the harm, but bearing the worst of the pain. But today, I believe, their voices have been heard, and that we finally have some hope to offer them.

I welcome the long-overdue stand that the G8 has taken, and this landmark Declaration. And I want to thank the Governments of the countries that have made funding commitments today. I particularly endorse the Declaration's strong words on rights and freedoms for women and children, and its promise to include women in peace processes and democratic transitions.

I welcome the recognition of male victims of sexual violence; and the practical action promised to help to lift the stigma from survivors and provide rehabilitation - particularly for children.

There is no choice between peace and justice: peace requires justice. So I welcome the pledge by the G8 to regard rape and sexual violence in armed conflict as grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions; and to give no amnesty to those who commit these crimes. And I fully support the work that will now begin on an International Protocol on the Investigation and Documentation of Sexual Violence in Conflict, and look forward to its adoption.

Foreign Ministers, millions of people have been waiting for the commitments you have just made, and they will be watching to see them implemented. You have promised to work together to raise awareness of sexual violence and to bring down the barriers to justice. And this significance cannot be understated.

It is also encouraging to see men in leadership positions speaking out against rape, and I hope many others will follow your example.

I pay tribute to Zainab Bangura for her courageous and wonderful work; And I want to thank William Hague for his leadership: Rape is not a women's issue, or a humanitarian issue, it is a global issue and it belongs here at the top table of international decision-making where he has put it. So I look forward to campaigning with him at the UN, and I call on other governments to make this cause their priority. If they do, this will be the start of a new global alliance against warzone rape and sexual violence; and finally an end to impunity.

Thank you.

Further Information

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G8 Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

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