Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict: Next Steps

2014-07-14

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Mr William Hague: I wish to inform the House of the next steps in the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) following my statement to the House on 16 June.

The aim of PSVI is the eradication of rape as a weapon of war, through a global campaign to end impunity for perpetrators, to deter and prevent sexual violence, to support and recognise survivors, and to change global attitudes that fuel these crimes.

We have made considerable progress since the launch of PSVI in May 2012. There is a new readiness among national governments and international institutions to confront sexual violence in conflict as a war crime and social taboo, and to introduce practical measures to combat it. The Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict launched at the UN in September 2013 has now been endorsed by 155 governments. At the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, which I hosted in June with the Special Envoy of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Angelina Jolie, we brought together over 125 countries, eight UN Agencies, the major multilateral institutions, over 900 experts and survivors from around the world, and thousands of members of the public who visited the Fringe or took part in our social media campaign.

We launched the first International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict. Cameroon, Benin and Niger endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, significantly increasing its impact in Africa. The Federal Government of Somalia presented a National Action Plan for addressing sexual violence, with the backing and support of the UN and the international community. Ministers of the Democratic Republic of Congo committed themselves to implementing quickly their National Strategy to Fight Sexual Violence and the commitments made through the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. The African Union announced the launch of a pilot project in the Central African Republic (CAR) to respond to the urgent needs of victims of sexual violence, and will now deploy a team of experts including medical doctors, psychologists, lawyers and police officers under the AU Mission in CAR, MISCA. The Libyan government pledged funding to enact into law the recognition that victims of sexual violence and their families are victims of war, and are therefore entitled to health care, scholarships and rehabilitation services. A number of countries including the UK and US also pledged funds to support survivors of sexual violence.

Our goal now is to embed, once and for all, international acknowledgement and agreement that we can end sexual violence in conflict. We want to see clear evidence that countries are living up to the commitments they have made – by putting in place measures to bring more perpetrators to justice, by providing better support to survivors and by ensuring that this issue remains at the heart of conflict prevention and foreign policy worldwide.

The United Kingdom will therefore now seek:

To implement globally the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict. This will include translating and disseminating the Protocol internationally, and providing training that will help national authorities improve investigations and mount successful prosecutions. There must be no impunity for rape and sexual violence in conflict.

To persuade other governments to incorporate the prevention of sexual violence into their military doctrine and training, including zero tolerance for all such violence, improved military conduct and discipline, and the recognition that this is a vital aspect of conflict-prevention and peace-building.

To ensure that international multilateral institutions adopt measures to address sexual violence in conflict. For example, we will intensify work with the EU to ensure that preventing sexual violence in conflict is included in all Common Security and Defence Policy missions and relevant EU external funding instruments, including for training, protection, and support to survivors.

To support the efforts of the African Union and United Nations to ensure that the protection of civilians includes action to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by UN and AU personnel in peacekeeping settings, and women’s participation and the promotion of gender equality in all peace and security efforts.

To use UK expertise to help national governments to prevent and prosecute sexual violence in conflict, to improve care for survivors, and to provide training to improve their military and police capability. We will focus this work in the first instance on Libya, Somalia, Bosnia and the DRC and the Syrian National Coalition, to ensure that a future Syrian government treats this as a priority.

To ensure the reform of national domestic legislation where necessary to enable the prosecution of internationally-recognised war crimes, as part of wider efforts to further promote the universality of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

To ensure global recognition of the dignity, needs and rights of survivors of sexual violence in conflict, and greater support and protection to survivors of sexual violence, including children.

Increased support for Human Rights Defenders, including by lifting legal and administrative restrictions and ensuring that violations against them are investigated promptly and impartially and to hold perpetrators to account.

The formal inclusion of women in peace processes as a new international norm which is implemented in practice.

In support of these goals, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will:

Maintain Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict as part of the core business of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office – as an essential aspect our work to prevent conflict, promote human rights, and exercise the soft power of the United Kingdom. This includes lobbying for action to address sexual violence in conflict in all countries and settings where it occurs.

Use the networks of UK posts overseas to pursue these objectives, and ensure that Embassies will write PSVI objectives into either their country or multilateral business plans where relevant.

Strengthen the UK Team of Experts, to support an increase in the number of International Humanitarian Law deployments and the ability to provide a wider package of training to militaries, as well as provide an ambitious level of training to support implementation of the International Protocol in Libya, Bosnia, Somalia and the DRC, and in relation to the Syria conflict.

Increase work with other government departments who come into contact with survivors of sexual violence in conflict, including through the asylum system and the Crown Prosecution Service, to ensure consistency in across HMG policy commitments and approaches.

Consult NGOs and survivor groups and their representatives on the further development and implementation of PSVI, and work to strengthen bipartisan support across UK politics for these goals and objectives.

Propose new means of monitoring international progress towards tackling warzone sexual violence.

Use the UK’s influence to promote and increase the participation of women in peace processes worldwide, and to lobby other governments to do the same.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will develop a detailed plan of activity for the next twelve months to implement these objectives internationally and monitor progress.

We will use milestones in the international diplomatic calendar to advance these goals, including the UK Presidency of the Security Council, the NATO Wales Summit, the UN General Assembly, the African Union Summit, and the G7.

We will maintain strong visible UK leadership, while working to a sense of collective international responsibility and national determination to root out these crimes wherever they occur, so that the cause of ending sexual violence in conflict generates unstoppable global momentum.

Further information

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