Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

“The Islamic State did not just come to kill us ... but to take us as ... merchandise to be sold in markets”.

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I am very grateful that France has scheduled this debate today. The women, peace and security agenda is a high priority for the United Kingdom and I am very glad that my country is the pen holder for the Security Council on it. And I also join others in welcoming the briefings that we heard from these speakers this morning which I found humbling and moving.

If I may, I’d like to quote the words of an earlier briefer.

“The Islamic State did not just come to kill us … but to take us as … merchandise to be sold in markets”.

Merchandise to be sold in markets.

Those are the words of Nadia Murad, the Yazidi activist who addressed this Council in December. She ended her speech saying “These crimes against women and their freedom must be brought to an end today.” That was six months ago.

Sadly, as the briefers and the Secretary-General’s report make clear, we’re not there yet. We have not yet brought these crimes to an end. The crimes continue; in Syria, in Iraq, and in places as far afield as Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In response, we cannot be deterred; our efforts must be unrelenting and equally far reaching. I look forward to working with Spain on Roman’s five operational points and I have my own four steps to put forward today.

Step one, we must begin by bringing order to the chaos that groups like Da’esh or Boko Haram thrive in. These groups don’t recognise laws, they don’t recognise borders. They operate with impunity, with no regard for the legitimate authorities or the human rights of those they enslave and traffic.

That is why the UK is playing an active role in the Coalition to defeat Da’esh; in taking back the land they claim to govern. It’s why we’re working tirelessly on Syria as part of this Council and as part of the International Syria Support Group to forge a peaceful, political solution; one that ends the crisis that has driven the growth of Da’esh. And it’s why we’re working so

closely with other countries who face the destabilising influence of extremists, so that their hatred cannot take hold.

Slowly, our efforts to defeat Da'esh are working; they've already lost over a third of the territory they once controlled in Syria and Iraq. But this is just the first step.

So step two, we also need to ensure that militaries and security forces can prevent and respond to sexual violence, and that they are trained and equipped to do so. The UK for instance is training Peshmerga troops in Iraq so that they can respond sensitively and appropriately to the needs of survivors of Da'esh's sexual violence and trafficking.

But we recognise that this isn't an issue confined to one corner of the globe. That's why we're also training African peacekeepers and soldiers, including the army in Mali. And it's why we're training our own troops as well as those from Croatia, Romania, Slovenia, Morocco and Kyrgyzstan.

We all have a role to play. Our own countries' police and military need to be more representative of our societies, with greater recruitment and greater promotion of women. And if the United Nations itself is to play it's full role in ending the scourge of sexual violence, it cannot, it must not be a part of the problem. No one wearing a UN blue helmet should ever take part or even be associated in any way with sexual violence, exploitation, or abuse.

Anyone who commits these crimes, whether a peacekeeper or a Da'esh fanatic, must face justice. Accountability cannot be selective.

So that is why - step three - the UK is building the capacity of governments, of judiciary, of police, military and civil society to strengthen prosecution of sexual violence. We have done so in Bosnia, in Colombia… in DRC, Iraq and Kosovo… in Nepal, Syria and Uganda. Such efforts must lead to more investigations and more prosecutions, through the International Criminal Court and through hybrid and domestic courts. There can be no impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes.

And finally step four, we need to challenge the harmful stigma towards survivors of sexual violence in conflict. Survivors and children born of rape are too often ostracised from their families, exiled from their communities. When a survivor escapes the horror of sexual violence, she should find hope and support, not rejection and silence. So together let us all challenge any culture that accepts, condones or justifies sexual violence.

Let me close with this final thought. If we are to succeed in ending these crimes, and what the Yazidi activist Nadia Murad implored us to do, we will need the widest possible support – from the grass roots all the way up to global organisations. And to do that means working with non-governmental organisations. They are vital partners. The UK works with organisations like Tearfund to support survivors of sexual violence in the most remote parts of eastern

DRC. They help women and girls in desperate need, in places governments struggle to reach.

Yet, over the past week, over 250 NGOs have had their bids to join the UN either delayed or rejected, the majority for spurious reasons. Many of these NGOs lead the charge on human rights and women and gender issues. These organisations empower women and they can empower our efforts so that women and girls are no longer treated as ‘merchandise in markets’. We need to be letting them in, not shutting them out.

So I call on the Committee on NGOs of the UN Economic and Social Council to stop these arbitrary deferrals and let these NGOs in. I hope you all will join me in this call. Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-islamic-state-did-not-just-come-to-kill-us-but-to-take-us-as-merchandise-to-be-sold-in-markets