



Wilton Park



Image: Katharine Sidelnik/War Child UK

Conference report

**Preventing sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations**

Monday 12 – Wednesday 14 November 2012 | WP1199



## Conference report

# Preventing sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations

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### Summary and key points

An increased understanding and awareness of sexual violence as a tactic and weapon of war has grown in the international consciousness over the past few years. There is now increased momentum from the international community to break the silence of sexual violence in conflict, combat a culture of impunity and shift the balance of shame from the survivors to the perpetrators.

On 29 May 2012 the British government launched a new initiative at a critical time aimed at preventing sexual violence in conflict. The UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, considers this a vital issue that needs to be tackled, with more international commitment and motivation, since; “where there is no justice or dignity for survivors, development is held back, and the seeds of future conflict are sown.”

The primary objective of the UK’s initiative is to quash the culture of impunity by:

- (i) increasing the number of perpetrators brought to justice both internationally and nationally
- (ii) strengthening international efforts and co-ordination
- (iii) supporting nation states to build their capacity to address sexual violence

Britain will use its G8 Presidency in 2013 to increase awareness and seek greater global commitment to meet these objectives. The UK has already proposed a new International Protocol on the investigation and documentation of sexual violence in conflict.

One of the key objectives of the conference was to identify where global leadership on this issue could make a difference; particularly with practical and institutional changes to establish a new culture of deterrence. The conference aimed to disseminate a broad and deep understanding of a complex problem and for those experienced in this area to share lessons learned in both local and international contexts. These discussions have further informed and shaped the UK initiative.

An impromptu session on Syria addressed concerns that not enough was being done to prevent and protect Syrians from the conflict related sexual violence. Recommendations from the Syria session were presented to the Foreign Secretary at the conference. These are presented in full later in this report.

Participants at this high level meeting comprised representatives from the United Nations, national governments, policy makers and practitioners, representatives from civil society organisations, legal experts and academics. Speakers included the Secretary General’s Special Representative (SRSG) on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Representative on Children in Armed Conflict. The UK Foreign Secretary gave a keynote speech at the conference. Welcome remarks were made by Lynne Featherstone, the Parliamentary Under Secretary for the Department for International Development (DfID) and Ministerial Champion for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Overseas.

*“There is now increased momentum from the international community to break the silence of sexual violence in conflict, combat a culture of impunity and shift the balance of shame from the survivors to the perpetrators.”*

*“Sexual violence in conflict is a security, development and human rights issue.”*

Among core themes arising in the discussion were:

- Sexual violence in conflict is a security, development and human rights issue. Violations perpetuate an atmosphere of insecurity and instability and provide a major challenge to sustainable development and peace. Such crimes require an integrated and coordinated response which addresses all three aspects of the problem.
- The need to change the narrative to enable survivors to speak out without fear of shame, stigma and victimisation. A change which will bring male champions of the agenda to the foreground; have a tangible impact on changing community attitudes; perpetrators' behaviour and encourage a culture of deterrence.
- National ownership, leadership and responsibility are key priorities to ensure the success in advancing the agenda. There should be a greater focus on the responsibility of nation states and more encouragement for affected countries to take ownership of processes. The international community can contribute to bridging the gap between international efforts and grassroots organisations. Local organisations tend to have a deeper understanding of social contexts and have the trust of local people which can ground international efforts to tackle the issue.
- Greater coordination, collaboration and cooperation are needed to ensure that humanitarian, security and development sectors are working together in a coherent and complementary way. On an international, national and local level increased coordination is necessary to have a tangible effect on; mobilising political will; implementing existing frameworks and ensuring that a survivor centred and holistic approach is always at the centre of service delivery.
- Justice for survivors, their families and the community must be approached in a holistic manner which carefully considers not only what people want in the way of justice, but that which will have the greatest impact on long term stability and reconciliation. Justice should be seen to include approaches that are restorative, reparative and retributive.

### **Context: international frameworks and the wider debate**

1. Sexual violence is a highly effective weapon of war; it humiliates, dominates, instils fear and creates enduring ethnic, religious, family and community divides. Some compare this to extending the battlefields in war to the bodies of women, men, and children. Sexual violence affects children and men as well as women, a fact often overlooked, not only in the debate but in reality. Of the thousands of reported rapes in the Democratic Republic of Congo, up to 50% of all survivors were under the age of 17, and 10% were under the age of 10. Male survivors are often marginalised with a pronounced lack of appropriate services or agencies willing to address their needs. Sexual violence has been used in Chile, Iran, Syria and Sri Lanka as a weapon of war against men. In Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina out of 6,000 people in a concentration camp 86% of men were raped.
2. There are a number of types of sexual violence in conflict; these may be tactical and strategic or opportunistic. The root causes of sexual violence in a particular conflict can include; unequal relations between genders, poverty of soldiers, the need for improvements in civil-military relations. These should be identified and acknowledged to ensure the design of prevention strategies are effective and relevant. Prevention strategies need to be grounded in an understanding of the nature of conflict; the profile of the victim; the profile of the perpetrator; what form of sexual violence is occurring and why. An understanding of these factors is necessary to design tailored and effective prevention strategies.
3. To address sexual violence there is an overarching framework of international human rights law and mechanisms that can be used to support and move forward the agenda to prevent sexual violence in conflict. Paragraph 15 of A/Res/67/1 A

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*“The international frameworks that circumscribe the issue of sexual violence in conflict provide a mandate for action by international bodies and states.”*

*“Several unhelpful myths about sexual violence in conflict persist.”*

Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels identifies the importance of access to justice for women and legal frameworks to address all forms of violence against women. In paragraph 16, the Declaration recommitments to the full implementation of the rights of the child and recognises the importance of the rule of law to protect those rights. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) can be used as a tool to encourage member states to fulfil their commitments to human rights. Further mechanisms and guidelines include the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

4. The set of commitments laid out in United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security provides a more specific international framework. UNSCR 1325 (2000) calls for the participation of women at all levels of decision-making on conflict resolution and peace building. Subsequent related resolutions address sexual violence in conflict more specifically; widening the range of actors and increasing international and national responsibility for ending impunity. UNSCR 1820 (2008) recognises the importance of sexual violence as a conflict and security issue. UNSCR 1889 (2009) addresses women’s exclusion from early recovery and peace-building and asks for women protection advisors in peacekeeping missions. UNSCR 1888 (2009) calls for the establishment of the Special Representative of the Secretary General’s Office. UNSCR 1960 (2010) identifies the need for monitoring mechanisms and provides a focus on accountability measures. These resolutions support and reinforce the preventing sexual violence in conflict agenda. They can be leveraged as a political tool to push for the implementation of their mandates to change the way institutions, including the UN and states, address sexual violence in conflict.
5. Beyond the human rights and women, peace and security frameworks, it is useful to contextualise the issue of sexual violence in conflict within the wider debate on gender equality and women’s empowerment. There are concerns about the increasing pressure on gains made internationally to promote women’s rights. The Commission on the Status of Women, a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established in 1946, sets global standards to promote gender equality through concrete recommendations. However, in recent years the agreements made in their annual reports have been threatened by increasingly conservative non-governmental lobby groups and some states. Among the latter, Pakistan, China and Russia represent reactionary views. This is despite the existence of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which sets out a bill of rights for women. State parties that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to take appropriate measures to reform or amend their legislation to ensure compliance with the tenets of the CEDAW. Work to prevent sexual violence in conflict realises CEDAW by strengthening legislation to improve women’s access to justice and to protect women’s rights.
6. The international frameworks that circumscribe the issue of sexual violence in conflict provide a mandate for action by international bodies and states. Yet despite their importance, sexual violence remains pervasive and an issue that affects men and children as well as women. Clearly international agreement is only one factor; political will (nationally and internationally), funding and resources are needed to build capacity and change behaviours and practices to address accountability at national levels.

## Advancing the agenda: key conference themes

### Challenging a culture of impunity: changing mind-sets, changing behaviours

*“Mobilising sustained political will is key, but this must translate into more investment in women’s participation and empowerment...”*

7. Several unhelpful myths about sexual violence in conflict persist. The first is that sexual violence is inevitable, which leads to a tacit acceptance by military personnel committing these crimes that they can act as they do as sexual violence is either one of the legitimate spoils of war or an acceptable military tactic. The second is that it is unspeakable; fear, shame, stigma and cultural norms all contribute to shrouding this issue in silence. The third myth is the misunderstanding that sexual violence in conflict is somehow less a crime than other war crimes and crimes against humanity. The reality is that for some of the survivors the legacy of this violence is a sentence “worse than death.” It leads to a loss of honour and societal status because of the associated shame and stigma. Husbands may leave their wives or vice versa, and communities may ostracise victims, leaving them without property, income or shelter, There is often a legacy of unwanted children – ultimately impacting on the next generation. Overcoming these misconceptions and their implications requires action on a number of fronts and includes attitudinal change. Not least amongst security sector actors.
8. Mobilising sustained political will is key, but this must translate into more investment in women’s participation and empowerment, particularly in peace processes; increased funding and resources to civil society organisations representing the rights and interests of women, men and children; support to judicial and security sector reform; greater international coherence and cooperation; and a greater focus on capacity building for states to enable them to address these issues, build awareness and shift expectations and attitudes towards a greater respect for human rights.

### Reforming the security sector

*“...international peacekeeping forces deployed through the UN must also be held to account for their behaviours.”*

9. Security sector actors have an important role to play in protecting peoples’ rights. Security Sector Reform must include provision to ensure that the police and the military not only act within the law and within the Geneva Convention, but that there are clear provisions and systems to hold individuals and leadership accountable for their actions. Beyond including a specific focus on training to build understanding and awareness, and on establishing systems of accountability, there is also a need to ensure that conditions of service and pay are such that security forces involved in conflict do not prey on civilian populations and particularly the vulnerable among them. Increasing the number of women and their participation in security frameworks is also shown to reduce instances of sexual violence.
10. In addition to working at national levels, international peacekeeping forces deployed through the UN must also be held to account for their behaviours. Systems exist to exclude any individual peacekeepers found guilty of transgression. Mechanisms and tools to address sexual violence in conflict will be much more effective and embedded in peacekeeping, military and police forces if these actors have ownership over the tools and processes developed and indeed the capacity to implement them.

Practical recommendations to combat impunity in the security sector:

- Ensure those in the security sector are knowledgeable of the UN Security Council Resolutions, the Geneva Convention and national laws addressing sexual violence and that their mandates include protection from sexual and gender based violence
- Build the military’s capacity for strict command and control structures.
- Punish superiors who fail to address accusations of sexual violence in conflict being committed by their troops.

*“Messaging and communication are key in challenging attitudes and misconceptions about sexual violence in conflict; confronting perpetrators and changing behaviour.”*

- International community to support technical assistance such as facilitating the involvement of South African and Northern Irish women in police reform and inclusion in the vetting process for police, military and peacekeeping forces during support efforts in crisis situations.
- Post-conflict Disarmament Demobilization Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) programmes should integrate gender perspectives and include an understanding of sexual violence.
- Set up centres or units for gender issues in military operations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).
- Identify and promote relations between communities, security agencies and local authorities at local level and extend nationally.
- Devise national security campaigns which bring police, women and survivors together to enforce zero tolerance of sexual violence.
- Strategic communications outreach- “shift the shame” campaign- to families to reduce stigma and put the focus on the perpetrators.
- Put appropriate structures in place to ensure that security forces are properly paid and live in respectable conditions to remove the need for them to pillage and live off the population.

### **Messaging and communication: saying no to shame and stigma**

Messaging and communication are key in challenging attitudes and misconceptions about sexual violence in conflict; confronting perpetrators and changing behaviour. More coordination on an international, national and community level is necessary to ensure communication strategies are targeted, complementary and coherent and maximise impact.

11. There is a call for a more comprehensive narrative around sexual violence which incorporates the plight of men and children whilst also referring to the broader gender equality debate and the issue as it affects women. Men are affected in similar ways to women when they become victims of sexual violence; they experience acute shame, stigmatisation, and are often ostracised by their wives and communities. However, their needs remain largely unaddressed and services for male survivors are not adequately resourced, accessible or tailored to their needs. Male gender stereotypes work negatively against recognition of their suffering; their unique challenges as survivors must be communicated, understood and addressed.
12. Communication strategies targeting communities need to be context specific reflecting the unique concerns and difficulties faced by the specific community; community solutions are needed for community problems. The non-governmental organisation War Child, for example, has trained children to interview each other to survey their concerns in the community. The child interviewers then brought these concerns to district leaders, local militia and police forces engaging community leaders and potential perpetrators in the dialogue. They called for concrete action to be taken; such as more police presence on the way to school. Encouraging communities to develop their own messaging and communication strategies leads to ownership of processes and more meaningful, sustainable impacts.
13. The World Health Organisation (WHO) found that communications projects which contextualised sexual violence in a broader initial discussion of gender inequalities and then reinforced messages over an extended period of time were, on the whole, more successful than those that took a short time frame and targeted approach.

*“Communication strategies targeting communities need to be context specific reflecting the unique concerns and difficulties faced...”*

14. Recommendations for messaging and communication strategies:
  - Promote and support community leaders, changers and influencers to endorse and spread messaging for greater impact.
  - Use innovative and creative methods of messaging; radio sensitisation shows, soap operas and puppets.
  - Encourage survivors to talk to each other.
  - Include men and male survivors to champion the preventing sexual violence in conflict agenda, adapting messaging to specifically target men.

### **Early warning and early response: monitoring and data collection**

15. The concept of 'early warning' implies a warning to elicit a response; in the case of sexual violence in conflict a rapid response is often needed. The success of early warning and prevention depends on two key processes; early warning techniques such as mapping sexual violence, monitoring and reporting. And, using the evidence gathered, for intervention that is timely and either prevents sexual violence occurring or effectively prevents it spreading. This second process is the one most often lacking in implementation and necessitates political, military and state leadership to respond in a coherent and coordinated manner to threat and to intervene before it is too late. There is a strong obligation on states to respect the commitments to Responsibility to Protect (R2P) citizens from harm.
16. The practice of early warning entails awareness of an array of different signals that could indicate sexual violence in conflict. These signals can include:
  - Increasingly restrictive laws for women
  - The media scapegoating women
  - A change in women's mobility patterns
  - Heightened sexual harassment
  - Reports of survivors and verifying testimonies
17. Collecting accurate data on sexual violence in conflict is particularly difficult since sexual violence is exceptionally underreported. There is considerable debate around the problematic nature of identifying trends and patterns of sexual violence in conflict when there is an absence of conclusive quantitative data on this subject. According to the Human Security Report (2012) there are problems with underreporting because of the taboo and stigma associated with sexual violence, but there is also a tendency to exaggerate the scale of the problem based on a small number of isolated cases (e.g. Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo is not representative of other conflict contexts). Despite this, the data that is collected can be used in important ways to prevent sexual violence. Whilst the hard data on sexual violence in conflict is often poor, patchy or absent, the data on the effects of sexual violence for survivors and the community are not. This data can be used to research and analyse why sexual violence is prevalent in some conflicts and not others and among particular actors. By looking for commonalities in groups that do not commit sexual violence in conflict; data could be used to prevent sexual violence in another conflict with a different set of actors. More resources and focus needs to be given to better data collection.
18. There are a number of innovative approaches that appear promising. Crowd mapping technology is now being used to map, predict and prevent sexual violence in conflict. For example, Women Under Siege, a New York based organisation, is using crowd source mapping to analyse the levels and spread of sexual violence in Syria. The organisation compiles reports from the BBC, International Criminal Court (ICC), UN and from individuals; categorises the cases by the level of violence perpetrated, highlights the number of survivors and details the consequences such as pregnancy and depression. They also outline the profile of the perpetrators whether government forces, non-government, or civilians. There are some

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difficulties with the approach. In Syria, for example, not all reports can be verified, but by looking at patterns and recurring trends, it is possible to ascertain a fairly accurate understanding of the situation. It is now known that sexual violence is often occurring at check points; when soldiers are looking for information about rebels and when towns are bombed and subsequently looted.

19. A number of effective measures and prevention strategies were identified:

- Training and sensitising the military, police, officials and health workers on proper conduct and on sexual violence; how to recognise survivors and respond to their needs.
- Mainstreaming a sensitised and gendered approach into the police, military, justice and service delivery infrastructures.
- Capacity building and resources; ensure that the correct logistical support such as the police and court rooms are fully functioning.
- Intervention and rapid response; the international community should respond early where the most effect can be had i.e. refugee camps. The tools and resources for intervention, such as R2P, should be mobilised to support the agenda.
- More funding to be channelled into building community resilience, sensitising and public information campaigns to encourage a change in community attitudes towards sexual violence and instil responsibility in the community to prevent and protect.

### **A survivor centred approach: mobilising and coordinating service delivery**

20. Three key challenges to effective and sensitive service delivery for survivors are; an absence of coordination and collaboration of different service delivery organisations; a lack of expertise of how to support survivors, particularly male survivors; and limited funding. ‘One stop crisis centres’ where survivors of sexual violence in conflict can receive and have access to all services required, such as; legal advice, medical, psycho social support and livelihoods training would greatly improve the quality of service delivery. Policy aspirations and the operational capacity on the ground are greatly mismatched in this area.

21. A survivor centred approach entails ensuring that the approach adopted and the services offered are tailored to meet the needs of each individual.

Recommendations and guiding principles for a holistic and survivor centred approach:

- Understand and respond accordingly to the different needs of female, male and child survivors.
- Design Standard Operating Procedures to help investigators engage in clear and transparent dialogue with survivors explaining who has access to testimonials, the legal process and providing an honest management of expectations.
- Offer survivors a choice of who to talk to and give them the opportunity to ask questions and clarify.
- Design the process to encourage empowerment rather than further victimisation; give survivors ownership over the process by offering them options and ensuring their needs are heard and addressed.
- Create sexual violence referral units at police stations and hospitals to deal sensitively with sexual violence cases.
- Ensure that a structure of psycho-social assessment and support prior to interviews and investigations is readily available for survivors.



- Ensure the safety of survivors and witnesses through protective measures.
  - Provide support for the survivor, their family and the community, particularly mediation when community and familial bonds have been broken.
  - Involve faith and religious leaders to bridge the cultural divide.
22. The opportunity presented by the UK Foreign Secretary's G8 campaign could address policy reform and mobilise resources so that funding in this arena matches policy commitments, enabling organisations to deliver their mandates. This can be achieved by advocating for more effective use of resources; supporting existing efforts to map services and addressing gaps in multi-sector service provision in key countries.

## Improving practices in sexual violence investigations

23. While there is substantial international commitment to implement robust investigative processes to ensure that evidence is admissible in national and international law, there remain considerable difficulties. Sexual violence crimes are consistently under reported; countries affected by conflict related sexual violence very often have limited capacity to carry out investigations and, in some cases, a lack of political will and leadership; well meaning international actors (NGOs, the UN and others) often carry out investigations that duplicate, or overlap with previous ones rendering evidence inadmissible in courts; respect for the chain of custody and the preservation and processing of evidence can be haphazard. Furthermore, there are issues with protecting survivors, for example multiple interviewing of survivors and witnesses can re-traumatise. It is essential that the interests of victims and survivors are at the centre of investigative practices. These need to be shaped by the careful adherence to the principles of 'do no harm'.
24. Those conducting sexual violence investigations need to be able to be flexible and respond to the specific circumstances and context within which they take place. They also need to adhere to best practice in order to reduce the risk that evidence will be inadmissible in court. Experts working on these criminal investigations should be sensitised to and trained on sexual violence; yet the teams must be rapidly deployable at national and international levels to enable Fact Finding Missions and Commissions of Inquiry to be conducted in a timely manner. Standard Operating Procedures or guidelines that effectively bridge the gap between what is required at an international and national level for prosecutions are needed. The UK initiative provides an opportunity to use the diplomatic campaign of the G8 foreign ministers track to seek agreement around the principles of what constitutes best practice and to produce an internationally endorsed Protocol.
25. Holistic support at 'one stop crisis centres' providing a range of options and services for survivors including; interpreters, witness protection, trauma counsellors, medical aid and legal representation could encourage more survivors to come forward. The crisis centres would need to ensure that high levels of protective measures are available for survivors and witnesses so that they feel safe and supported giving testimonials.
26. It is important that investigators use every available body of evidence available and draw on a variety of sources including survivor's testimony. Other types of evidence gathered could be forensic in nature or utilise technology such as Global Positioning Systems and Geographical Information Systems (GPS and GIS) to track the movements and communication of troops who have been involved in abuses. The use of experts testifying about the consequences of sexual violence can also highlight the consistency of survivor's testimonies.

Recommendations for improving sexual violence investigations:

- Create clear international investigation Protocols and Standard Operating

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*"Justice is a key cornerstone of enabling survivors and communities to come to terms with the conflict..."*

Procedures for sexual violence investigations drawing on best practice.

- Form a permanent standing capacity for sexual violence investigations, targeting specific countries and produce a national roster of experts to build the country's capacity to conduct investigations.
- Build relationships and the capacity of local NGOs as they often have early warning indicators and can provide information on troop movements, defections and are usually first responders.

## A balanced approach to justice

27. Sexual violence has long-term, often pervasive impacts on survivors and their communities; it can cause ruptures which continue long after the conflict has subsided. Justice is a key cornerstone of enabling survivors and communities to come to terms with the conflict and take positive steps to move forward with their lives. Justice is a concept with many different facets and has different meanings for different people, contexts and countries. When addressing sexual violence in conflict it is necessary for justice to be viewed in its fullest and broadest sense and a balanced approach must be taken. Justice for survivors of sexual violence can mean prosecutions and accountability for perpetrators; Truth and Reconciliation Commissions where the silence is broken and perpetrators are faced; reparations and support for survivors to rebuild their lives. Justice for survivors can take one or all of these forms; it does not happen in a vacuum divorced from circumstances and a context specific approach is often required. International, national and community level justice mechanisms ought to work together to complement each other. These structures should ensure survivors have the opportunity not just to secure prosecutions but to access medical and psychosocial support, educational and economic opportunities to help them and their families recover.
28. In Liberia through a referendum people chose peace and restorative justice over prosecutions. Liberia's 1986 constitution granted amnesty to those who participated in the sexual violence during the conflict and the 2003 statute granted immunity from prosecution. The peace accord signed by warring factions on 18 August 2003 was witnessed by the UN, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU). Liberians faced the perpetrators in a Truth and Reconciliation Commission; between 50% -70% of Liberians wanted restorative justice. They chose to discuss the root cause of the war and define a path forward to restore their country rather than an international tribunal. 17,160 statements were taken from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 50% or more were by women. In this case impunity prevailed in the wider pursuit of peace and the rehabilitation of Liberian society. However, Liberia post 2006 offers stringent measures for anyone committing sexual violence; in 2009 there were 28 trials and 18 convictions.
29. In Bosnia, prosecutions and accountability for crimes is a long, slow process. More than 4,500 people are awaiting trial, partially due to political obstacles. Even when justice is served the electoral law allows sentenced war criminals to stand for office. An international mandate is needed to intervene in national investigations and ensure that justice is served.
30. The legal process, both internationally and nationally, are essentially masculine structures which can make it difficult to realise the rights of sexual violence survivors in a gender sensitive manner. The legal process as a whole necessitates a gendered approach, which in practice should involve more women in the judiciary and legal professions. It should also ensure domestic legislation enables the prosecution of sexual violence rather than hindering it. Delivering robust and integrated sexual and gender based violence training to investigators, lawyers and judges to educate them in gender sensitivity is vital. Training should include how to interact with sexual violence survivors and treat them in a manner which is

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*“Our generation has the opportunity, and the responsibility, to confront the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war.”*

William Hague, UK  
Foreign Secretary

sensitive, impartial and respectful.

31. Recommendations to improve the delivery of balanced and inclusive justice:

- Psycho social support is required to de-traumatise survivors and witnesses (especially children).
- Mechanisms to rehabilitate and mentally disarm and demobilise perpetrators is necessary to ensure they can reintegrate and function peacefully in society.
- Reparations to support survivors are needed in addition to prosecutions.
- Sexual violence crimes should be a comprehensive part of investigating and prosecuting war crimes;
- Promote long-term and forward looking mechanisms for post conflict reconstruction, such as establishing rule of law, judicial reform, and developing specialised gender and sexual violence units.
- Command responsibility within the military and security forces. Aiding and abetting should become a criminal act in all nations and a component of national strategies for prosecuting crimes.
- There should be no immunity in peace agreements for perpetrators of sexual violence and they should not be allowed at the peace table.
- Long-term commitment, investment and mentoring to build national structures; social, health and economic to enable the population affected to come into formal justice mechanisms.
- Survivors and witnesses should have ample protection to ensure their safety, including face and voice distortion in court.

Recommendations for ending sexual violence in Syria:

- UK and the G8 to provide immediate funding to existing humanitarian responses that focus on sexualized violence, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that women have access to safe mechanisms for medical and psychosocial services, reporting, and legal aid.
- UK to make diplomatic overtures toward Russia on intervening with the Assad regime specifically about the use of sexualized violence with a view toward ending it. It is important to emphasise the on-going use of tradition and culture that puts women and girls who have been sexually violated at risk of honour killings and forced marriage.
- UK to support and encourage other G8 members to support a Security Council referral of the situation in Syria to the ICC. In addition to the provisions within the Rome Statute, UN SC Resolutions 1820, 1888, and 1960 clearly prioritise the need to address and end sexualised violence in armed conflict. This alone is enough to trigger a referral from the Council.
- UK's NATO ambassador to seek opportunities to create a relationship with Russia on ending sexualised violence in Syria. Russia has expressed interest in collaborating on 1325 to engage women in a peace-building process, according to the NATO Secretary-General's Special Representative on Women, Peace, and Security and make similar overtures through the OSCE.
- Review and refine European Union (EU) sanctions; evaluate the socioeconomic effects as well as the efficacy toward ending the conflict, black-marketeering and criminality, peaceful transition, and accountability. Sanctions are facilitating the creation of an illegal black market and increasing the risk of the trafficking of women for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Such trafficking of Syrian women has already been documented.

- Support civil society politically; work with international civil society initiatives that are aimed at raising the profile of Syrian women’s perspectives and voices.

## Policy recommendations: the way forward

The discussion of progress and what more needs to be done to move the agenda forward elicited a number of areas for further consideration. Some of the most immediate recommendations include:

- Creation of international investigation protocol/ Standard Operating Procedures informed by experience and best practice of international criminal courts, commissions of inquiry and tribunals which the G8 states sign up to and support.
- The G8 can provide a platform for coordination of investigation efforts, bringing together humanitarians and the justice sector for greater impact.
- Design international standardised sexual and gender based training for first responders and human rights officers. Support trainees with; a mentoring system, creation of a peer support network and follow up specialised training and the provision of practical tools to train such as audio visuals.
- G8 to push for the adoption of a memorandum of understanding between the UN, governments and other entities to streamline the process of rapidly deploying teams of experts including investigators for commissions of inquiry.
- Adoption of G8 long-term commitment to support human rights defenders and activists at the grassroots level by pushing for the implementation of the EU human rights defenders guidelines and ensuring defenders receive fair treatment in their own countries.
- Garner support at G8 level for women and women’s organisations consultation and participation in peace negotiations and mediation and draw up a roster of female mediators. The G8 to urge the UN to implement their mediator’s guidance for ‘Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Ceasefire and Peace Agreements. In addition encourage the UN and other relevant bodies to meet a target of mediation teams being 30% women in the medium term and 50% in the long term.
- G8 members to encourage states to devise 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs) and to coordinate, implement and evaluate their own NAP.
- G8 to convene working level and ministerial level meetings to take forward recommendations on the delivery and mobilisation of services; particularly those that have a context specific approach.
- G8 to scale up funding for support services; such as ‘one stop crisis centres’ that address the problems of both men and women.
- G8 to mobilise resources e.g. for the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) justice ministers to ensure service provision and build the capacity of weak government institutions.
- G8 to push for an Arms Trade Treaty with gender analysis as a key component.
- The G8 can urge member states to implement Article 5 of CEDAW which requires all member states to actively change attitudes and modify behaviour to reflect gender equality.
- Men’s support and participation is vital to bring about a change in behaviours and attitude. The G8 can coordinate next steps to be taken to engage male state leaders, prosecutors and those in the security sector in championing the agenda and the creation of network of male survivors and advocates for the agenda.
- G8 to engage with the UN Security Council to encourage the implementation of their own resolutions and to enforce sanctions on countries that have no political

*“Men’s support and participation is vital to bring about a change in behaviours and attitude.”*

“Preventing sexual violence in conflict and challenging the culture of impunity is a global responsibility and is vital to building sustainable peace.”

- will and do not enforce the resolutions.
- G8 to support a women's security charter; encourage national security forces to sign up and hold them to account.
  - The UK initiative to strengthen its cross-government approach, particularly with DfID and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to integrate a security, development and human rights perspective into the initiative and to ensure complementarity between programmes.
  - The UK initiative to consider commissioning research to highlight the economic impacts of sexual violence in conflict on a country's economy.

## **Conclusion**

Preventing sexual violence in conflict and challenging the culture of impunity is a global responsibility and is vital to building sustainable peace. There is increased international momentum, appetite and ambition to address this issue and end the scourge. The Foreign Secretary, in his keynote address outlined the UK government's approach; stating that the approach will be: "increasing our support to UN efforts, raising the profile of the need to confront sexual violence in conflict in every way we can, and proposing new action that we hope will be adopted by many nations in a new collective effort for our generation." The Foreign Secretary affirmed; the need for justice to be viewed in its fullest sense and for the sexual violence agenda to be part of a broader effort to empower women through women's rights, participation and education. In conclusion, to advance the preventing sexual violence in conflict agenda requires; better coordination between the humanitarian, development and security sector; national ownership and a shift in the balance of shame from survivors to the perpetrators.

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Wilton Park | November 2012

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