

Speech: We need to knock down the wall of silence around Syrian women: by Lord Ahmad

Today the world marks the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. Around the world, sexual violence continues to be used as a weapon of war on a scale that is truly appalling. This is particularly true of the tragic war in Syria: according to a UN Commission of Inquiry report earlier this year, “no one had been unaffected by sexual and gender-based violence during the Syrian conflict”. This horrifies us all – based on the UN’s findings, we are talking about a whole generation of people affected mentally and physically by these violent crimes.

However individuals and communities, with the UK’s assistance, are working to give voice to survivors and support them to secure justice and we are at the forefront of the international community’s efforts to secure justice for survivors, shatter the culture of impunity, and tackle the stigma faced by survivors. In 2014 we hosted the largest ever summit on preventing sexual violence in conflict, bringing together governments, NGOs, experts and survivors to begin to change global attitudes to these crimes. In Syria, we have given £10 million through our Conflict, Security and Stability Fund to support gender-related projects since the start of the crisis, including supporting Syrian organisations to raise awareness of women’s rights, to treat survivors of sexual violence, and to document medical evidence for use in any future prosecutions. We have also provided £30 million to the UN Population Fund in Syria to help reduce and mitigate gender-based violence, and provide life-saving sexual and reproductive health services.

The lawyers and doctors working on the ground in Syria to support survivors and bring their cases to light deserve all of our admiration. Their stories, shared here for the first time, reveal the importance of documenting sexual violence in conflict to build up a body of evidence for prosecutions, to hold perpetrators to account, and to help deter future sexual violence. On this International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, we honour their dedication in seeking justice for survivors.

A lawyer working on documenting sexual and gender based violence in Syria.

All our work documenting sexual violence cases is confidential. Names are kept concealed, and files are codified. The documented cases constitute a file on which legal action could be based in the future. It is the right of these women to have justice done, and to punish the perpetrators of these acts. There is a real fear of attack or threats to doctors involved in documenting these abuses.

There is no denying that there were acts of violence, rape and sexual abuse

before the revolution, but numbers then were meagre as there was law and punishment in place then. Since the revolution, huge numbers of cases have been reported from the detention centres. Most of the documented cases are of female detainees held by the regime. The acts of violence ranged from sexual harassment to forceful stripping of clothes to rape and further worse instances. Sexual violence was practiced in some areas as a weapon to intimidate a particular group to move to another area. There were also cases from the refugee camps because no accountability system was in place.

We focus on educating women on their rights. We need to try to change stereotyping in the community, to knock down the wall of silence of women and rid them of the social stigma attached to victims. When a son is detained and then released, society tells the father "be proud of him and keep your head high because he was a detainee" Why not so when the detainee is a woman? She was detained, and she could have done nothing to prevent it. And when she was abused violently outside jail, she was the victim, not the perpetrator. We need to alter the way society views these women.

A Doctor providing medical treatment to survivors and documenting evidence in Syria

The organisation I work for specialises in documenting cases of sexual violence that have taken place in detention centres. This not only includes regime detention centres but also those that belong to other armed groups that are present within Syria. We also receive cases that require medical, psychological services or legal assistance, and we try to help them with that too, referring them to other organisations who can help.

I do this work in my spare time, usually a day or 2 a week. For security reasons I cannot discuss the nature of my work with anyone, even those closest to me are unaware of what I do. Just by meeting with someone who has just been released from a regime detention centre I am putting myself in danger.

Due to the stigma surrounding the issue, women who have suffered from sexual violence whilst in detention often have no one to support them, and are often turned away by their families. They hear about us through other survivors, nurses or first aid centres. They do not tell anyone about what has happened to them as they worry about the community's perception. We are most often the only people who have heard what they have been through.

During the year and a half that I have been doing this, there are two cases that have really touched me personally. When I was receiving my training, I attended the case of a woman in her fifties who was gang-raped by teenagers. She said they were the age of her children. The second case was of a woman who had just been released from a Daesh run detention centre. She told me that you could be walking in the street and suddenly they pick you up, beat, whip you and undress you on the street. She eventually ran away with her children, leaving her husband behind. Their words still echo in my ears and I cannot get the images of them out of my mind. Each story I have heard is painful. These stories must come out to the public. These injustices must be

stopped once for all.

Syria has been under tyranny and oppression for 20 or 30 years. I do not want my children to go through the same thing. There are individuals who have been in jail for months or years, in unimaginable conditions. I do not want us to continue to live under fear of torture and violence from the police-state regime – not being able to raise our voices in protest. One day I hope that we will be able to live freely like a normal country.

Sometimes I feel like this hope is a bit far-fetched, but when I look at other countries which have experienced civil wars like us, or even when I look at the First and Second World War, places where people's lives eventually came together again, I regain some hope.

Press release: Members of huge drug-importation conspiracy to spend longer in jail

Two members of an organised crime group have today had their sentences increased after the Attorney General, Jeremy Wright QC MP, referred them for being too low.

David Reece, 55, and Everton Bailey, 57, were arrested as part of an investigation into a large-scale conspiracy to import massive quantities of Class A drugs into the UK via Hull. The plan was to distribute the drugs to dealers across the Midlands and North West.

In May 2017 a shipment of 142.5kg of high purity cocaine and heroin with a street value of £66.5 million was stopped in Belgium. The investigation identified 38 similar trips, at least some of which would have involved similar amounts of drugs.

Reece and Bailey were both originally sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment at Preston Crown Court in March. Today, after the Attorney General's referral, the Court of Appeal increased their sentences to 19 years each.

Commenting on the sentence increase, the Attorney General said:

This was a sophisticated commercial conspiracy to import massive quantities of drugs into the UK, which will have had a serious impact on communities across the Midlands and the North West. It is important that this is reflected in the sentencing of every person involved, and the Court of Appeal's decision to increase Reece and Bailey's sentences today helps to achieve that.

Detailed guide: Small Grant scheme – livestock handling items in short supply

If you've received a grant under the Countryside Productivity Small Grant (CPSG) scheme, you may find that a small number of livestock handling items are in short supply. These are:

- SG1 – mobile cattle handling system
- SG2 – fixed cattle handling system
- SG5 – cattle squeeze crush
- SG27 – mobile sheep handling system
- SG28 – fixed sheep handling system

The CPSG scheme rules state that grant recipients have 150 days from the date of their Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) to purchase, take delivery and pay for the grant funded equipment and submit the grant claim. The 150 day date is shown in your GFA.

However, we have amended the rules for these items in short supply for the first round of CPSG 2018. If you are unable get the items shown above, this will help you to submit your grant claim within the 150 day period.

You can choose one of the following options:

1. Withdraw from your Round 1 GFA. You will not be able to claim grant on any items if you have already purchased them. You can reapply in the autumn of this year for Round 2.
2. Continue to purchase the items that you have a grant offer for. You will need to:
 - order, pay in full for, take delivery of and install all other items included in your GFA before the end of the 150 day period * Bullet 2
 - order and pay in full for the livestock handling items at your own risk before the end of the 150 day period
 - submit your grant claim before the end of the 150 day period shown in your GFA and tell us the expected delivery date for the livestock handling items
 - take delivery of the livestock handling items and send RPA proof these have been delivered to your farm, such as a delivery note, by 29 March 2019.
RPA will then process your grant claim.
3. Keep to the terms of your original agreement. This means all items must be bought, installed and working within 150 days

If you have already withdrawn from your GFA due to the short supply of the items shown above, and you want to take up option 2 above, you can ask RPA to reinstate your GFA, by completing the template that has been emailed to you. If you withdraw, at any time, from Round 1, you will be able to reapply under Round 2. Details of Round 2 will be available on GOV.UK in the autumn.

[Speech: Exchequer Secretary speech to Goldman Sachs](#)

Thank you Ronnie.

I'm grateful to Goldman Sachs for inviting me to join you today, to meet the alumni of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business programme and to celebrate what you've achieved so far.

Creating a business is one of the greatest things you can do. If you've built a business, been part of a team that did or supported a loved one build one, you can't help but respect entrepreneurs – risk takers and wealth creators upon whose shoulders all our prosperity and our public services depends.

I remember my own parents deciding to quit their jobs and cast aside our relative financial security and set up a business around our kitchen table. Between them they were CEO, CFO, salesman, secretary and van driver. The roof above our heads was on the line and was frequently at risk if a cheque was late, a customer went under or a product failed to hit the mark. That's probably the story of the beginnings of most of the businesses in this room. It's not unusual, but it is extraordinary.

Setting up a business can seem like the line in Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, when one of the players remarks that "life is a gamble at terrible odds – if it was a bet you wouldn't take it". It's a smart observation, but it's flawed in two regards as you never win if you don't try and sometimes you do win. Who would have imagined that we would be here today in Bloomberg's majestic £1 billion European headquarters, when 35 years ago Michael Bloomberg used his severance cheque from Salomon Brothers to start his business.

That's why we need to build the enterprise culture that encourages entrepreneurship and the economic model that helps your businesses to grow and to realise your ambitions.

And in both of these respects, we have work to do. Our economy is resilient. Unemployment is at a near record low. Employment is at a record high. We are creating more start-ups than any other country in Europe. We are seeing some of these grow into the global brands of the future, with at least 13 unicorns, none of which existed 15 years ago, more than in any other country.

in Europe.

We are leading Europe for venture capital funding and in developing new technology businesses, harnessing our great Universities and indeed the depth and strength of our financial services industry here in the City of London to create new sectors, such as Fintech will already employ more than 60,000 people.

But we have work to do, because our productivity lags behind our major competitors and we cannot sustain all of these advantages if we allow that to persist.

In 1979 the gap between our productivity and that of the USA was an astonishing 38%.

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The gap never went away however and since before the financial crisis, the gap has grown once more. It now takes us 5 days to create what the Germans can do in just 4.

And the evidence suggests that our greatest productivity challenge is amongst small and medium sized businesses.

Studies suggest our SMEs exhibit lower take-up of digital systems than our competitors, whether that be online sales, supply chain management data analytics or cloud computing;

That while we have a broadly similar proportion of firms with management well versed in the best practices and aware of productivity driving technologies, we have significantly more firms who score poorly in those respects;

That while some of our leading businesses bring their supply chain of SMEs together to diffuse ideas and the latest technology, many do not and many SME businesses lack the network they seek to share, learn and benefit from healthy competition.

In short, tackling Britain's productivity problem is the economic challenge of our generation and it begins with those small and medium sized businesses with the appetite to scale-up.

That is why initiatives like Goldman Sach's 10,000 Small Business programme matter and I'm inspired by the smart philanthropy of Goldman and the work of the business schools who are collaborating with them. We're backing John Lewis' Sir Charlie Mayfield's Be the Business which also seeks to increase productivity by bringing SME's together, by sectors, supply chain or geography, to improve management skills and awareness of new technologies and practices.

In manufacturing, we are funding Made Smarter, which is led by Jürgen Maier, the CEO of Siemens, and aims to encourage the adoption of productivity improving digital manufacturing processes, such as the automation, robotics and artificial intelligence – much of which is now within the financial reach

of SME's. Made Smarter's first pilot is commencing shortly in the North West and we'll be following its progress closely.

The thread which runs throughout each of these private sector led movements is the irresistible advance of technology and the imperative that SME's embrace it and benefit from it. The pace of technological change has never been so fast, and yet will never be so slow again.

If the productivity opportunity of the 1980s was reform of the labour market, restrictive practice and state owned industries, the productivity opportunity of today is to drive awareness and adoption of new digital technologies which will transform every industry and part of business, as well as public services, in the years ahead. Government will not win this race for us, but it can help. That is why the Chancellor created the £31 Billion National Productivity Investment Fund. We see this as a campaign on four fronts.

We're investing heavily in the networks that connect businesses and people together – the largest sustained investment in our national infrastructure since the 1970's, including radically improving our roads and railways and investing over £1 billion in improving our digital infrastructure, the focus of which has now turned to rolling out full fibre broadband to every premise over the next 15 years.

We're re-shaping our education system for the digital age. At the Budget last year, the Chancellor announced an additional £260 million investment in maths and computer science education.

And we're addressing the generational imbalance in this country in favour of universities and academic qualifications at the expense of high quality technical education, working with employers to develop respected standards of apprenticeship and introducing T-levels, technological qualifications that will mean all 16-18 years year olds have a choice of academic or technological paths of equal status and rigour – and amongst the first T-levels will be digital and engineering skills.

We're increasing access to finance for business, including by establishing the British Business Bank whose programme now supports more than £4 billion of finance to over 65, 000 smaller businesses.

And we're committed to maintaining a highly competitive tax environment for business people, because we believe that you should keep more of what you earn and to be an attractive destination for the brightest and best, we need a tax system that holds its own internationally. That's why we've reduced corporation tax to 19%, amongst the lowest of any major developed economy.

That's why we've maintained our enterprise incentives, SEIS, EIS, and the Entrepreneurs Relief, which are respected around the world. And that is why we've invested in R&D by increasing the generosity of the R&D tax credits and by establishing the Patent Box to back you in creating new ideas and technology and commercialising them for the benefit of us all.

Of course, there are critics of these incentives who would seek to roll them

back, but we see entrepreneurs as private citizens doing public good – creating jobs, opportunities, products and ideas to move society forward. And there's one further element government can offer, it can create a climate of optimism.

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Pessimism needs to be arrested, because it misses the many exciting and uplifting things going on in our economy today, exemplified by business represented here. And it needs to be checked because not only is it depressing, but it can become self-fulfilling and makes economic success impossible.

This year will be a pivotal one for the economy as we seek to define the new economic relationship between the UK and European Union. But how we respond to the productivity challenge will define the future of our country long beyond the Brexit challenge. It is the economic challenge of our generation. It requires courage and conviction, translated into a coherent and consistent course of action. It requires government to commit to adjure the short term expedient and to take the long-term economic decisions.

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And above all, it requires entrepreneurs and business people to embrace the opportunities presented by emerging technology, to be the diverse models of an enterprise culture which values success, sees failure merely as success postponed and looks to the future with confidence.

Thank you for inviting me here today. Thank you to Goldman for this programme. Good luck for your future.

[News story: The Analysis Function](#)

To realise the vision of “A Brilliant Civil Service” transformation, Sir Jeremy Heywood and John Manzoni identified vital cross cutting services or Functions to efficient and effective government. At the end of 2017, Analysis (shorthand for analysis, research and evidence) was included as one of these Functions. Following the Analysis Function conference in January 2018, this month sees the launch of the Analysis Function Strategy digitally, in profession boards and at Civil Service Live. Significant contributions to the strategy have come from all of the profession support teams, boards and individual members. So congratulations to all those that have helped make this vision possible!

What is a Function?

The Analysis Function is a collaboration between the analytical professions to achieve functional objectives. Functions have a common purpose on

standards, strategic overview across government, building capability and careers. For the Analysis Function this means:

- Set one standard for analysis across departments which everyone can easily follow.
- Strategic cross cutting department view on priorities, resources, issues or risks.
- Build analytical and critical thinking capability outside of the Function.
- Own a consistent career framework across government to drive attraction, develop members, increase talent and diversity.

What is in it for you as a profession member?

- A broader and more flexible career offer as more roles are opened to all analytical professions.
- A broader and more varied learning and development offer for members as the profession teams increase collaboration.
- Opportunities to take on a wider remit building analytical capability outside of the Function.
- More contact between analysts and other professions to drive initiatives on the analysis standard.

What is in it for the analytical professions?

- Greater visibility for best practice analysis and analysts at the most senior levels of government.
- An opportunity to shape the structure and governance of analysis across government.
- A seat at the Civil Service People Board table where strategic resourcing and pay discussions are decided.

[Analysis function strategy](#)

[Analysis in Government](#)