

Foreign Secretary speech on preventing sexual violence in conflict

Thank you so much to Sarah Sands for chairing the Gender and Equality Advisory Council in what has been a tricky year, we've been in a lot of Zoom meetings, a lot of hard work, but what I think has enabled us to do is really bring in fantastic women and men from across the world to contribute to the recommendations, which really are fantastic. And I'd just want to thank all of the GEAC members who are here today for their hard work that they put in and the expertise that they put in.

We are determined as a UK government to take forward these recommendations, to embed them, and make sure that we are following up and monitoring the progress we make, because what gets measured gets done and we're determined to make that happen.

Supporting women and girls is at the heart of UK foreign policy. We want women to have agency over their own lives and to be free to succeed. We want them to have access to education. Our core agenda of promoting freedom and democracy cannot happen without freedom for women. But regrettably, in too many places across the world, women are treated as second class citizens. They are beaten and killed. They're trapped in servitude. They're deprived of education and opportunities. And the United Kingdom wants to work with our friends and allies across the world to change this.

Today, we're announcing £20 million to prevent violence against women. We're also holding the Preventing Sexual Violence Against Women Summit next year, ten years since this cause was championed by our government and that is taking place under the leadership of Lord Ahmad.

In the spending review a few weeks ago, we announced that we're restoring the development budget for women and girls straight away, and the work is being led by my colleague Vicky Ford on making that happen. We're going to focus on 12 years of quality education for all girls across the world, a cause championed by our Prime Minister. We're going to focus on the appalling practise of female genital mutilation across the world.

We're going to tackle the abhorrent practise of the use of sexual violence in war. It is grotesque that sexual violence and rape is used as a weapon of war and it's used to exercise power over women. It's wrong that it's treated less seriously than chemical warfare or landmines, and that's why we want to build a new consensus with friends and allies across the world to condemn it as a red line.

All options are on the table, including a new international convention. I'm grateful for our many friends in this room, like Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Lithuania, Indonesia, Hungary, Latvia and Liberia have already signed up. And I know more countries are joining us in our promotion of this cause. I also want to thank the Lord Hague and his team for his leadership on this

issue and the many people in this room who championed this issue for years. We are determined to end the culture of impunity around the use of sexual violence. We want a world where women have agency over their own bodies and their own lives. And together we can make this happen. Thank you.