

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women 2021: UK statement at the OSCE

Thank you Chair. Gender-based violence is one of the most systemic and widespread human rights violations of our time. One in 3 women worldwide will experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination increase the risk. The intersection of gender bias and disability stigma and discrimination means that women and girls with disabilities are 2 to 4 times more likely to experience non-partner sexual violence than women without disabilities. Gender-based violence is rooted in gender inequality. It threatens the lives and wellbeing of girls and women and prevents them from accessing opportunities that are fundamental to both freedom and development.

We know that violence against women and girls can be prevented. We've seen this in action through our 'What Works to Prevent Violence' initiative. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a UK-funded project with faith leaders and community action groups halved women's experience of intimate partner violence from 69% to 29%. UK-funded evidence helps to drive more concerted, coordinated and scaled-up global action across the international system to prevent gender-based violence. At the Generation Equality Forum in Paris this year, we launched the 'What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale' programme to systematically scale up proven approaches to prevent gender-based violence, taking an evidence-based and intersectional approach.

Earlier this month, the Foreign Secretary launched a [new campaign to end violence against women and girls and to tackle sexual violence in conflict around the world](#). We are exploring the possibility of a new global convention to condemn use of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war as a 'red line' on a par with chemical weapons. And, next year, we will also host a major global summit on action to prevent sexual violence in conflict.

We know that crises and conflicts exacerbate gender-based violence. We've seen this during the current pandemic with the shocking increase in domestic and sexual violence. It's important to remember that climate change is also recognised as a serious aggravator of gender-based violence. Evidence shows that crises induced by climate change can exacerbate levels of domestic violence and other forms of violence. Gender responsive climate action is essential and it is vital that women and girls are front and centre in the policy making process.

At the OSCE, we've also seen some excellent examples of OSCE projects and activities that address gender-based violence. We need to continue and step up our efforts. We thank Sweden for making violence against women the theme of ODIHR's Human Dimension Seminar last week. It was an important opportunity to share experiences and best practice with civil society, and of course our thanks to ODIHR, and to Poland too for hosting.

Gender-based violence is a global challenge, and we need a global response. The UK is committed to making this happen. Thank you Chair.