

News story: Defence Secretary meets civil society groups to discuss human rights in conflict-affected areas

Staff from organisations representing the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Ukraine, as well as several international action groups, were welcomed to London to discuss the issues faced in their countries, particularly by women.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Conflict can have devastating effects for anyone caught in its path, but life can be particularly traumatic for women. They are subject to violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and their calls for justice are often falling on deaf ears.

I am determined we do more to listen to those who are often not given a voice. It is only by understanding the situation faced by women and girls that we will be able to protect them.

The event allowed the Defence Secretary to gain a greater understanding of the security situation faced by women, men, girls and boys in conflict-affected areas. In turn this will allow the military to develop better plans for protection of civilians.

The meeting was the first time a UK Defence minister has sat with civil societies groups specifically representing women's human rights from areas affected by conflict. The groups represented included Gender Action for Peace and Security, Action Aid, International Alert, the International Rescue Committee, Plan, Saferworld, Women's League for Peace and Freedom, Women for Women International, Security Women, Nigeria INGO Forum and Legal Action Worldwide.

The UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security has currently nine focus countries, five of which were discussed yesterday: DRC, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan. These nations either have UK military directly deployed there, or are nations where UK-trained peacekeepers are deployed.

The UK has already increased peacekeeping in Sudan and Somalia, has deployed four Military Gender and Protection Advisers to DRC and has established a UK centre of excellence to integrate guidelines on women, peace and security into its work. It is also among the first countries to publish a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.