

Speech: UK statement at the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women

I believe that every child is born with the potential to make a real contribution to society; and that communities and nations can achieve extraordinary things when the whole of society is truly empowered.

In our hearts we all know this, and yet we all still have some way to go to achieve true gender equality. In the meantime, all of our communities indeed our nations are being prevented from achieving our full potential.

Imagine, for a moment: a world without gender inequality. Imagine: no glass ceilings, no woman or girl cowed by violence or discrimination. Imagine 100% of the population, able to contribute 100% of their talents, 100% of the time. For all governments, this requires us to address the needs of women and girls at home, and to work together collaboratively to spread progress around the globe.

The UK Government will soon publish our new strategy on Gender Equality and Economic Empowerment. We will set out plans to dismantle the barriers that thwart women's progress at each stage of their lives. Our ambition is to ensure that every woman in the United Kingdom has the freedom, has the support, has the skills, and the choice to do what they want to do, and achieve what they are capable of. We are working hard to ensure that women are as likely as men to succeed in the workplace. To tackle the gender pay gap, we introduced legislation last year requiring employers to report their data. We are pleased that 10,000 have done so. This has been a catalyst for a national conversation, and has prompted many employers to take action to close that pay gap. We also remain totally committed to advancing gender equality internationally. It is at the heart of our approach to international development, international diplomacy and defence cooperation.

Mr Chairman, the Sustainable Development Goals will not be realised if we do not achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. Which is why the United Kingdom Government has announced landmark funding to support and empower them. We are now spending more than £1.2 billion over the next five years to expand access to sexual and reproductive health services around the world. We have also made the largest ever contribution to support the African-led movement to end female genital mutilation. The United Kingdom funded Girls' Education Challenge will help almost 1.5 million marginalised girls receive a quality education in some of the most difficult circumstances.

But perhaps most importantly, our world-leading research demonstrates that violence against women and girls is not inevitable, and our interventions can prevent it happening. And therefore we are giving support to women-led organisations, particularly women's rights defenders, to help them transform their own lives.

Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict remains an enduring priority for the United Kingdom Government. It is a personal priority for me as our Prime Minister's Special Representative on the issue. Which is why I am pleased to announce that the UK will host a major international conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict from the 18th to the 20th November 2019 – which marks five years since the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. It will be an opportunity to chart progress, address challenges, and secure new commitments for further action.

Mr Chairman, achieving gender equality is a universal global challenge, and one for which each of us shares responsibility. We must all do more, because unlocking the potential of half of the world's population is in everyone's interests. It will lead to a more just, more stable, and more prosperous world. That, Mr Chairman, is a prize worth fighting for. It is a prize worth fighting for today and every day.

Thank you.