



APPG on Women, Peace and Security



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All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security Event: *Assessing UK Government Progress on Women, Peace and Security*

**22nd February 2016
Committee Room 4a, Houses of Parliament**

Background:

The UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (UK NAP) is reported on by the UK Government annually in Parliament. NAPs are tools for states to outline their work and commitments on Women, Peace and Security. The current UK NAP runs from 2014 to 2017 and, together with the Implementation Plan, sets out the UK's aims and activities to implement its Women, Peace and Security commitments. It has an emphasis on six focus countries: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Libya, Myanmar, Somalia, Syria. The UK Government is required to report annually on its progress in implementing the NAP, which is a joint document shared between three Government departments: Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO); Department for International Development (DFID); and Ministry of Defence (MoD).

Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) publishes an [annual shadow report](#) to the UK's official report, in which UK civil society draws on the expertise of our member organisations and partners in conflict-affected regions to bring their perspectives to the table on how UK efforts on Women, Peace and Security are impacting the lives of women and girls on the ground. The 2015 shadow report draws on the results of a survey of civil society organisations working on Women, Peace and Security in the NAP focus countries mentioned above.

The Report to Parliament event offers an opportunity for dialogue on the findings of the UK NAP report and shadow report with Government ministers from the three relevant departments. It is a key measure in ensuring accountability.

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Chair) opened the event as co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security (APPG-WPS). She thanked the speakers for their attendance, particularly those who stepped in at short notice to replace Ministers called away on parliamentary business.

Baroness Verma, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for International Development and Ministerial Champion for tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Overseas highlighted a number of recent achievements on Women, Peace and Security as a result of work by government and civil society including the UK's commitments announced at the High Level Review of UNSCR 1325 in October. These include funding towards the Global Acceleration Instrument and the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security. The upcoming World Humanitarian Summit represents "a once in a lifetime opportunity" to ensure that humanitarian responses meet the needs of women and girls. The UN Secretary General report published in February 2016 highlights the need to prioritise women and girls.

In UK policy, for the first time the Strategic Defence and Security Review incorporates Women, Peace and Security. Women, Peace and Security is also intertwined with political, social and economic rights. It is important to tackle social norms and structural inequalities in order to fulfil Women, Peace and Security commitments.



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Melinda Simmonds, Head of Conflict Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, described several UK-supported projects promoting Women, Peace and Security. This includes supporting the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Syria since 2013, and lobbying the Yemeni government for female representation in the peace process. The UK also pushed for strong language on women's participation in UN Security Council Resolution 2254 on a framework to achieve peace in Syria.

Giles Ahern, Head of NATO and European Policy, Ministry of Defence, explained that the MoD is embracing the Women, Peace and Security/Preventing Sexual Violence agenda, led by Lieutenant General Messenger, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Military Strategy and Operations). A central requirement of the MoD is women's participation in overseas forces. The MoD also recognises that women and girls are not just victims in conflict but also change agents with multiple roles.

Recognising that sexual and gender-based violence can be exacerbated by the military, the MoD seeks to lead by example through conduct and thought leadership. The MoD is well on its way to delivering on its commitment, announced at the High Level Review, that by November 2016 all UK troops deployed on overseas missions will receive training on Women, Peace and Security and Preventing Sexual Violence.

Caroline Green, former Interim Director of GAPS, thanked the speakers and welcomed the UK Government's commitment and enthusiasm for the Women, Peace and Security agenda including the commitments made at the High-Level Review in 2015. The UN Global Study published last year found that progress on the ground has been far too limited. Caroline called on the UK, as a global leader on Women, Peace and Security, to go much further in affirming unwavering principles of support to this agenda alongside institutional systems to transform Women, Peace and Security commitments into real changes on the ground. Caroline outlined five steps that the UK Government should take, as set out in the GAPS report [Assessing UK Government Progress on Women, Peace and Security in 2015](#):

- Affirm that comprehensive action across the Women, Peace and Security agenda is a UK Government priority, with a focus on address the underlying causes of the challenges, human rights abuses and inequalities experienced by women and girls in conflict settings. Women's human rights must always sit at the core of the Government's efforts.
- Formally guarantee that women will always be included whenever the UK hosts talks. When talks are hosted elsewhere, the UK should provide financial and diplomatic support to women's rights organisations from conflict-affected states to ensure their participation.
- Guarantee that the UK Government's Women, Peace and Security plans can be resourced and implemented – earmarking finances for this agenda, tracking spending through gender markers in wider development, humanitarian and stabilisation funding, and through a dedicated budget for the NAP.
- Guarantee consultation of women's rights organisations and local civil society in the design and review of UK Women, Peace and Security objectives and ensure that the views of women and girls and their reflections on new and emerging issues are integrated in UK Government planning.



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- Commit to strengthen transparency with an open book on the UK's progress against Women, Peace and Security commitments including clear monitoring and reporting processes.

Sahar Mediha Al-Naas, founder and director of Libyan Women for Peace and Freedom, drew on the results of recent consultations with Libyan women to highlight the current situation resulting from the ongoing crisis, and the type of support needed from international partners such as the UK Government.

Issues raised by Sahar included the risks faced by women human rights defenders, who face abductions and torture. The civil war has created 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Libya; poverty and discrimination are widespread and the Libyan people are suffering as a result of the conflict which started in 2011. Basic services are lacking, children are not attending school and hospitals do not have essential equipment.

Sahar conveyed several recommendations from Libyan CSOs to the UK Government:

- The majority of women she spoke to do not want military intervention in Libya for fear that Libya will become 'another Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria'.
- British humanitarian assistance is urgently needed, but it must not be used as a bargaining tool or an instrument of political pressure.
- The UK should also increase support to neighbouring countries.
- Within Libya, the UK should support Libyan civil society and map the current situation. Funding should be targeted to grassroots organisations and translation services should be used to ensure that diverse groups are reached and included.
- Comprehensive efforts should be made to dry up ISIS's sources of funds, and real and genuine pressure should be placed on national and regional political actors to stop arms from reaching ISIS in Libya.

During the **Question and Answer** session, points raised included:

- Baroness Kinnock noted the absence of women at the 2014 NATO summit, which came just three months after the UK's summit on sexual violence, and asked what actions the UK will take to ensure that women are able to participate in future negotiations. Giles Ahern, MoD representative, confirmed that NATO is engaged on gender issues with a dedicated centre and training programme, and that the UK will take steps to ensure women's engagement in the lead up to the next process in Warsaw in July 2016.
- Baroness Prosser asked how the UK can ensure that women's participation is *meaningful* rather than just seats at the table without any power. The Government representatives were also asked why there had been such a slow pace of progress in achieving change on Women, Peace and Security. Baroness Verma emphasised that the UK has pushed other countries to do more on Women, Peace and Security, but that it is not an easy fix solution and we need to do much more. The problem is ingrained and centuries old, and a holistic response is needed. The most important step is strengthening accountability through instruments and agreements that governments sign up to.



- The need for greater representation of women in senior UN roles was emphasised, with the UK in a position to encourage this through the support it gives to some UN agencies. The need for coordination between different UN bodies was also highlighted.
- Baroness Hussein-Ece asked whether the UK is using our soft power by attaching conditions to UKAid. Melinda Simmonds emphasised that the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) seeks to identify and support women's participation rather than approaching the issue as a one-on-one stand off with a country.
- Baroness Nicholson asked why the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED) investment in the MENA region was not working. The UK Government representatives asserted that further research is needed to understand why this investment did not work, and stated that one issue for the lack of success was the absence of a monitoring mechanism.
- The speakers were asked whether the UK will make a breakdown of the £1.2 billion pledged at the Syria Donor Conference held in London in February public. [As Baroness Verma had to leave prior to this the question was not answered.]
- The need for more financial support to Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) was raised, including the need for a long-term process to support and train WHRDs. Melinda Simmonds emphasised that the new Magna Carta Fund supports WHRDs.
- Margaret Owen (Widows for Peace through Democracy) highlighted that it is important not to see women in Syria as a homogenous group but rather as multi-ethnic. It was noted that the Syrian Women's Advisory Panel convened by Staffan de Mistura is multi-ethnic.

Following the Question and Answer session, **Baroness Hodgson of Abinger** thanked all those present for attending and closed the meeting.