

**Statement on *International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change.***

Thursday 30 November 2023

**1. Introduction**

As the UK Civil Society sector's network for Women, Peace and Security (WPS), Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) is a convener and coordinator for driving accountability, change and progress on the UK's commitments to WPS.

GAPS welcomes the publication of the White Paper and we are pleased to see a number of our recommendations reflected throughout. The paper provides strategic clarity for the UK in its approaches to development. Like the Integrated Review and its Refresh, the rights of women and girls in all their intersecting identities and gender equality remain a core policy priority. The inclusion of LGBT+ and disabled communities build towards an intersectional potential of UK development policy. GAPS welcomes the albeit limited Paper's language on prevention of conflict throughout the paper. Prevention is one of the four pillars of the WPS agenda, an agenda in which the UK has taken a leadership role, as penholder. However, given the central role of prevention in WPS and the Paper's focus on fragile and conflict affected states, we are concerned there is no mention of the UK's National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS, the only 'conflict prevention' strategy that currently exists. Without integrating the existing commitments to gender equality throughout UK policy, the Government risks operating in silos which will directly undermine the ambitions to get the UK and the world back on track to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Moving forward, it is critical that these commitments made by the UK Government, especially the fifth NAP, are sufficiently resourced and integrated throughout UK policy. GAPS and our Members stand ready to support.

**2. Initial Reflections**

**a. Partnerships**

GAPS Members made clear recommendations on meaningful partnerships and consultations. This includes being led by principles of transparency, accountability, intersectionality, an inclusive use of power and an acknowledgment of the persistent consequences of the global north's past. We have welcomed, throughout 2023, HMG's much needed shift away from the donor-recipient model and a move towards more meaningful partnerships. This continues within the new White Paper, and we recognise an integration of GAPS' recommendations across the Paper, including reference to partnership principles of mutuality and transparency, as well as the important "acknowledgment of our [the UK's] past". The White Paper also includes the recognition of locally-led WROs expertise in advancing gender equality and recognises a need for increased access to core, flexible multiyear funding. This is essential to fulfill the

commitment to strategic partnerships with civil society made under the fifth NAP: WROs are first responders to crises, uniquely positioned to recognise and respond to risks to prevent the escalation of violence, and experts on the needs of their communities and contexts. These policy developments represent a significant and noteworthy change in the UK Government's approach to valuing the expertise, leadership and knowledge of those most impacted by development policy. While GAPS welcomes this growing shift in understanding its relationships with states, communities and organisations receiving ODA, we urge the UK to continue to reflect on the unequal distribution of power and resources that remain rooted in its history of empire.

### **b. Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS)**

As highlighted in GAPS submission to the White Paper, climate change, development, conflict and gender are inextricably linked. We welcome new plans from the UK Government to open new avenues to scale up climate finance to meet the goals pledged. However, without clear commitments to loss and damage and rights-based, gender-sensitive approaches to climate action, the risks climate change poses as a threat multiplier to conflict and gender inequality cannot be sufficiently addressed. Marginalised communities face additional unique impacts because of their intersecting identities with women facing a quadruple crisis as they are simultaneously impacted by gender inequality, climate change, conflict and extreme poverty. Women and girls in all their diversity are frontline leaders in implementing climate action and interlinked challenges of conflict and inequality. A new offer for development must center those most affected, to ensure their knowledge and solutions are sufficiently resourced and learned from.

GAPS welcomes a needed prioritisation of FCAS across the White Paper and a recognition that, "we have to understand the importance of fragility and conflict in shaping development outcomes". Whilst this change in approach is fundamental for driving gender equality in conflict affected states, we are concerned by the lack of integration of existing policy commitments such as the 5th NAP on WPS and the Water, Peace and Security framework for driving both policy coherence and implementation. As GAPS recommended in our submission to the White Paper the integration of existing frameworks will be the key for driving action towards fulfilling the SDGs by 2030.

Despite the fact the 5th NAP for WPS is not integrated into the White Paper, GAPS recognise key approaches and principles of the framework included in the White Paper. For example, in addressing conflict prevention by investing in the analytical capabilities of the government to recognise risks of conflict and mass violence at earlier stages, including the root causes of gender inequality and other grievances, the Paper enables the UK to respond in faster and more consistent ways. We welcome the recognition of the importance of meaningfully including women at all stages of addressing conflict, including in prevention. The Paper also recognises the vital role of local WROs in promoting positive change and for their role in conflict response. To ensure these commitments become concrete and WROs can play these meaningful roles, new and additional funding is essential.

### **c. Funding and Implementation**

Commitments to alleviating the intersecting impacts of global crises restricting and rolling back women and girls rights will be locked in policy without long-term, flexible funding. We are in firm agreement with and celebrate the explicit inclusion of this call in the White Paper. Yet, even whilst the Paper recognises the need for direct funding for WROs it fails to commit any new funding to leverage the changes it seeks to make. Efforts to mobilise different avenues of funding, for example in the private sector or through development banks, cannot be used to abdicate UK moral and legal responsibilities on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). GAPS are concerned by the absence of a clear timeline for reinstating 0.7%. Continued ambiguity around funding commitments for strategy implementation indicates a bleak future for integrating the ambitious commitments laid out in the White Paper into policy practice. UK ODA cuts have already had a severe and disproportionate impact on women and girls and funding for civil society organisations is decreasing. The folding of CSSF into the Integrated Security Fund likewise risks the limited funding that exists for WROs with new priorities. The £33 million commitment to the Equality Fund was indeed a significant milestone in UK gender-specific funding, but there is no clarity on if such funding will be renewed. This has created an incredibly difficult environment to meet the ambitious commitments set out in the White Paper.

### **d. Lack of policy coherence**

The White Paper perpetuates a widening and dangerous disconnect between the UK's foreign and domestic policy. The Paper's commitment to "uphold international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law and meet our international obligations, and offer safe and legal resettlement routes to the UK for refugees fleeing conflict" is in direct contrast with the Prime Minister and former Home Secretary's increasing attacks on the international system for refugee protection and shared international human rights norms.

On the one hand the government commits to I champion longer-term approaches to protracted displacement while at the same time it offers extremely limited resettlement routes that are not functioning and people, including unaccompanied children, endure extremely long waits to see their claims decided.

Following increasingly draconian policies and legislation such as the compliant environment - previously known as the hostile environment - two-tier asylum system and Rwanda plan, the Illegal Migration Act 2023 has de facto removed the right to asylum. The Act means that neither asylum nor human rights claims will be considered by the Home Office, regardless of the strength of an individual's case. In fact, it creates a duty for the Home Secretary to remove those who arrive in the UK by any country the government deems safe. Essentially only those travelling via 'safe routes' will be allowed to present a case meaning the Act has an extremely limited provision, especially for those "refugees fleeing conflict" referenced in the White Paper. By refusing to take its share of responsibility to protect those fleeing wars

and persecution, the Government sends a clear signal to other countries that it is fine to do so. The result will be ever more dangerous and risky journeys for those seeking safety.

Another issue prioritised in the White Paper is support to open societies and to local activists, in particular women's rights organisations. However, space for civil society in the UK is shrinking.. In March 2023 Civicus downgraded the UK's civic space from narrowed to obstructed because of restrictions to the right to protest. In fact the recent Public Order Act sets a very low threshold to define disruptive protesting and has conferred broad and vague powers to the police to expand stop and search and prevent protests. Activists, in particular those campaigning for action on climate change and those defending the rights of trans people are demonised, especially in the media. Hate crime against LGBTIQ+ people is on the rise in the UK, with hate crimes against trans people rising most sharply. The United Nations Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity after his visit to the UK attributed this rise in part to the manner in which Government, and especially the Home Office, framed 'transgender issues'.

Credibility comes from leading by example. It is striking how much of a gap there is between the government's priorities for its development policy and political choices made at home.

### **3. Consultation Practice**

GAPS welcomed the ability to submit both written and oral evidence. Our team and members were able to provide our expert input during meetings across different thematic areas. However, in the spirit of championing the WROs at the frontlines of preventing, responding, and reconstructing after conflict, GAPS was disappointed by the accessibility to south-based WROs in this consultation process for this White Paper and shared this as part of our evidence submission. Given stretched summer capacity and changing timelines, the process for consulting and working with civil society for developing this paper did not deliver on consultation best practices. As referenced in the [Beyond Consultations](#) tool, and in the delivery of the 5<sup>th</sup> NAP, WROs and CSOs north and south based should have been invited to collaborate on the objectives and agenda of the White Paper.

Even whilst the Paper states consulting with 70 countries our experience of consultation did not match the tone of the Paper. Fundamentally, as a network with key partnerships with CSOs and WROs in conflict affected contexts we did not have the space or time to consult with our partners to inform our submission into the Paper. Opportunities should have been built into the process to increase WROs access to leadership and access to policy development. We were disappointed that gender, women's rights and WPS were absent in the outline for the call for submissions, and feared that this sent a message of shifting UK priorities to those it sought evidence from.

A truly more collaborative and co-creative approach must start at the beginning: if South-based organisations, especially Women's Rights and Women-Led organisations, were included at the terms of reference stage for the White Paper, meaningful consultation could have been embedded throughout the White Paper process. This will bring to life the "offer based on partnership and mutual respect, giving

leaders, communities and individuals a voice in shaping the solutions they want to see” as proposed by Minister Mitchell in the White Paper.

#### **4. Next Steps**

The White Paper sets out a new route for UK development, and its success will depend on the concrete implementation of its commitments. GAPS, as a long-standing ‘critical friend’, looks forward to continuing to work with the UK Government on the implementation of the White Paper alongside the 5th NAP and the International Women and Girl’s Strategy. We hope to build on the strong relationships we have with the Government and look forward to providing support and scrutiny.

GAPS also looks forward to bringing the GAPS network and its global partnerships to collaborate with the Government to identify opportunities to further the integration of the White Paper with Women, Peace and Security into Government strategies, policies and programmes on peace, conflict, security and stability. We look forward to bringing our expertise and leadership as a “vital policy and programme partner” to the UK, including ensuring implementation of the White Paper cuts across silos, for example on how gender equality commitments can be meaningfully integrated across the announced Strategy on Open Societies and Human Rights.