



gender action for peace and security

GAPS Secretariat Statement on the Safety of Rwanda bill

The passage of the Safety of Rwanda bill is the latest cynical attempt by the current government to deflect from the structural problems the British people are facing – rising costs, crumbling healthcare, failing schools – by targeting those made vulnerable by unjust systems. It undermines commitments to the rights of women and girls by putting them at risk as they seek sanctuary and through weakening the international system, further eroding the limited protections women and girls have.

Those fleeing violence and persecution already have experienced enormous trauma in home communities and on journeys aiming for safety. Journeys they are forced to go on as safe routes are fully shuttered, with tremendous delays and obstacles, even for limited exceptions. The thousands of Afghans, including the women, girls and LGBTQI+ people escaping gender apartheid, in limbo in Pakistan demonstrate the failure of supposed safe routes. Even Afghans who worked with UK forces are not exempt from this new legislation, despite putting the lives of themselves and their families at great risk in order to support the work of the UK government. The continued externalisation of asylum puts people further at risk, with particular catastrophic consequences for women and girls. Often already survivors of sexual violence, current legislation creates ever more dangerous situations. For all, this legislation will cause tremendous mental stress as well as physical. It is as callous as it is cruel.

The legislation is an abuse of the rule of law and contravenes the international commitments the UK has signed, including the Refugee Convention. It directly undermines UK commitments to Women Peace and Security, an international agenda the UK claims leadership of and is the penholder for at the UN Security Council. It reveals an incoherency around the domestic implementation of the agenda and brings into question the legitimacy of the UK's flagship Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict programme by denying survivors their inalienable rights to sanctuary.

In the [International Development White Paper](#), the Government wrote that “the UK defends and promotes human rights, the rule of law and accountable institutions. We will work with our partners to ensure that a reinvigorated multilateral system will effectively uphold global human rights norms.” By passing the Safety to Rwanda bill, the Government has rendered these words and those of legal institutions, such as the [Joint Committee on Human Rights](#), as meaningless. This bill is fundamentally incompatible with the UK's stated commitments to human rights. The UK weakens its own legal commitments and emboldens likeminded states, especially those in Western Europe, to replicate similar inhumane schemes. This is a direct assault on the international legal system and plays right into the tactics of maligned actors the UK claims to oppose.

The UK emboldens this age of impunity from atrocity crimes, transferring over millions to a regime that persecutes its own citizens – from Indigenous peoples to LGBTQI+ individuals to opposition figures and journalists – and is involved in escalating violence in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The DRC is a focus country in the UK's commitments to Women Peace and Security, yet it remains unclear how Rwandan involvement in the violence, which includes high rates of sexual violence, has shaped the framing of this bill and the UK's relationship with Rwanda.

This is a matter that transcends partylines, and we are profoundly disappointed in any and all who opted to vote to establish a cruel legal regime that will speed up the unravelling of the international

legal systems. At a time where the UK is deeply polarised and hate crime is rising, such performative cruelty is a betrayal of communities everywhere, with the women and girls at the sharpest end despite the commitments the UK has made to Women Peace and Security.

Appropriate and realistic safe routes must be established. The UK must invest in a strengthened international system and ensure its commitments are upheld domestically. The UK must meaningfully consult migrant rights organisations, women's rights organisations, and civil society to develop immigration policies that prioritise the lives and needs of asylum-seekers. The UK must commit to building more just systems globally and tackling root causes of injustice, ensuring people are not forced to move due to profound inequality, rising conflict, deepening poverty or a ravaged climate.

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