

THE FIRST 100 DAYS OF WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY

Women Peace and Security in the UK

Adopted in 2000 through the binding United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325, Women Peace and Security (WPS) is a comprehensive legal and policy framework that acknowledges the unique ways which women and girls experience and respond to conflict. As a rights-based framework, WPS draws from and is based on the human rights, humanitarian, and criminal international legal regimes. WPS brings to the forefront a gendered lens, specifically ensuring the participation of women when considering conflict prevention, response, recovery, and resolution: there are four central pillars of the WPS agenda – participation, protection, prevention, and relief & recovery – that are key to the strategic objectives laid out in the UK’s fifth National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security. The NAP, a five year document from 2023 to 2027, is the translation of UK commitments into foreign and domestic policy. It has 5 strategic objectives: 1) increasing women’s meaningful participation, leadership and representation in decision-making processes; 2) preventing gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, and supporting survivors to cope, recover and seek justice; 3) supporting the needs of women and girls in crises and ensuring they can participate and lead in responses; 4) increasing the accountability of security actors, institutions and systems to women and girls and ensuring they are responsive to their rights and needs; 5) ensuring the UK responds to the needs of women and girls as part of its approach to transnational threats.

The WPS agenda is a codified and binding framework and must be underpinned by a crosscutting, inclusive, and intersectional gender, peace, and security approach and should work in complementarity with core UK policy architecture including the International Women and Girls Strategy and the International Development White Paper. Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) plays the important role of critical friend and is recognised as a key strategic partner by the UK Government for the role we play in the implementation of the UKs NAP.

Who is GAPS

Established in 2006, Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) is the UK’s Women, Peace and Security civil society network, made up of NGOs and experts in the fields of development, human rights, humanitarian and peacebuilding. We promote and hold the UK government to account on its commitments on women’s rights and gender equality in peacebuilding and conflict. GAPS works with a range of stakeholders including: UK government and Parliament; NGOs in the UK and in conflict-affected countries; academics; think tanks, and international organisations.

Signatories

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The new Government has a mandate and opportunity to make the UK and the wider world more fair and secure. The UK's effective implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is an essential framework to achieve this. The first 100 days of the new Government will be key for the UK to signal a change to the global community, that it is a leader on tackling the pervasive root causes of rising conflict around the world, including gender inequality.

It was under a Labour Government that the binding UN Security Resolution 1325 was signed and the UK became the pen holder for WPS at the UN Security Council (UNSC). Other states, especially our closest allies, will expect to see UK leadership on WPS in the run up to the 25th anniversary of the UNSC resolution next year. Re-investment in this vital, rights-based agenda is urgent as the UK's leadership has been slipping: while the UK's fifth National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS was published last year, implementation has been beset with delays and neglect. There is an opportunity now for the Labour Party to take back what it began and ensure it is done successfully, learning from the previous Government's failures, to shape the implementation of the NAP to ensure that the rights of women, girls and marginalised groups living in conflict are centred in all international policy. With the existing policy architecture, the UK is well positioned to lead this agenda- it now needs urgent investment to secure impact for millions of women, girls and marginalised groups around the world.

We face an international landscape where climate change is worsening, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies such as autonomous weaponry pose new challenges, the anti-gender movement is gaining pace, and conflicts are on the rise and becoming more protracted as well as disproportionately impacting women and girls and marginalised groups. In this context, the UK's NAP is a tool for implementing the WPS agenda across HMG, offering the UK Government a clear plan of action and guide to respond to the complexities of the current geo-political context and ever increasing rollback on the rights of women and girls and human rights worldwide.

The new Government must respond to this landscape by reinvigorating the UK's vital leadership role on the global stage as penholder of the WPS agenda, and championing women and girls' rights domestically and globally. In the run-up to the election, some parties including Labour engaged in a welcome debate on what [feminist approaches](#) to foreign and development policy may look like, signalling the importance of feminist, rights based principles including the domestication of the WPS agenda to ensure women in the UK and abroad can feel safe in their communities and engage in decision-making. Strategic investments and commitments into the capacity, knowledge and policies already there, especially WPS, can act as a foundation for the UK to be a leader on gender equality - and the profoundly interlinked themes of stability and security. GAPS and its members look forward to partnering with the new Labour Government, working in collaboration and partnership to support a renewed focus on WPS.

The following recommendations are to inspire swift, cost-effective and necessary action from the UK on WPS during the first 100 days of office. We include steps the Government can take at once, as well as guidance on actions to lay the foundation for sustainable, long-term and strategic change to further gender equality and justice. We understand the first week is needed to assemble a well-equipped and experienced Cabinet; now with everyone in place, it is time to translate these principles in clear action.

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1 Week in

- **Recommit to the 5th National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security.** This involves ensuring a fully resourced and staffed team within the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation, as well as a WPS focal point across HMG in all portfolios and streams of work and developing a clear-eyed strategy of ambitious implementation under the new Government. The NAP requires a transparent budget in order to progress the commitments made and well-built Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation framework to guide the UK in its progress, implementation and learning.
- **Ensure there is Ministerial level leadership dedicated to Women, Peace and Security** within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Ministry of Defence (MoD) to champion the agenda across HMG and in the UK's diplomacy, ensuring senior level political leadership and accountability. This Ministerial position should work closely in coordination with the International Development Secretary and the Women and Equalities Minister.
- **Invest in rights-based approaches by upholding the international legal system - which is under attack and unravelling - by cooperating with international and regional justice mechanisms** to ensure justice and accountability globally in a consistent and independent manner, and that justice is available for all women and girls wherever they are.
- **Commit to creating and resourcing a Civil Society Platform to facilitate and institutionalise meaningful consultation with women's rights organisations and civil society in the UK and globally** throughout the development, implementation and evaluation of all policies and programming. This is especially as the WPS NAP and the International Development White Paper recognises civil society as a strategic and long-term partner to the UK. This will be essential for any review, including the announced Defence Review and Spending Review. This must include embedding the [Beyond Consultations](#) tool throughout gendered conflict analysis training and sustained support for civil servants across civil service, especially FCDO and MoD. The recent failures to meaningfully consult, include or advocate diplomatically for Afghan women or civil society in the Doha meetings are an opportunity for the UK to push for and support genuine participation at all levels.
- **Immediately suspend all licenses and licence applications for the transfer of arms for use by Israel, pending a review of UK arms transfer licensing policy.** This should include aligning with [WPS commitments](#) and adopting a 'presumption of denial' principle, whereby arms export licences are refused unless the Government is fully confident there is minimal danger that they could be misused, including the danger that transferred arms could be used to commit or facilitate gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women or children.
- **Repeal the Safety of Rwanda Act and the Nationality and Borders Act.** Establish safe routes of passage for asylum-seekers and migrants, end the detention of women and girl asylum seekers, remove unjust burdens of proof for LGBTQI+ people, and expand routes to family reunion, learning from migrants' rights organisations, women's rights organisations and civil society. This is intrinsically linked to how the safety and security of all cuts across borders, and therefore the implementation of WPS must too.
- **Remove the UK's reservation to Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention** and provide equal protection for all women irrespective of migration status immediately.

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1 Month in

- **Take immediate and decisive action to facilitate the cessation of hostilities where possible globally**, including calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Palestine, continued support for Ukraine including by expanding a focus on gender in reconstruction, and supporting and amplifying Sudanese and regional actors and organisations working towards humanitarian relief and long-lasting peace. Ensure any peace processes and political bargains in priority countries, but ultimately in all WPS focus countries and other emerging crises, are inclusive of close consultation with civil society, specifically Women Rights Organisations, Women Led Organisations, and communities most affected. This must leverage lessons learned and replicating experience on UK support to Colombia's peace process, and support negotiations and peace talks that are inclusive and intersectional, led by community and aimed at securing long-term and sustainable peace.
- **Develop, implement and resource the Strategy on Open Societies and Human Rights, including integrating ICAN's Protection Framework for women peacebuilders and an improved approach to working with Human Rights Defenders, both of which the UK has already committed to.** The strategy should set out a strategic approach to partnering with and improving support for Human Rights Defenders, recognising the particular needs of Women Human Rights Defenders. The strategy should also recognise the need for consistent human rights protection at home and abroad, ensuring the right to protest is restored and protected in the UK and for the Government to call on partner governments across the globe to legislate against gender-based violence and for the protection of defenders from violence by state and non-state actors. This includes delivering commitments reflected in the International Development White Paper, in close partnership with civil society organisations, especially Women's Rights and Women-Led Organisations.
- **Institutionalise bringing together all four nations and implementing Government partners, with meaningful civil society participation, on a quarterly basis**, guaranteeing a coherent and comprehensive implementation of all gender, peace and security commitments, especially the WPS NAP, the International Women and Girls Strategy, the International Development White Paper and is embedded in all future gender-relevant policy.

100 Days in

- **Revisit the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict (PSVI) strategy, applying lessons learned and ensuring a cohesive approach with WPS.** Building on learnings from the UK-funded What Works programme, the UK must acknowledge sexual violence in conflict (SVC) within the continuum of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender-based violence (GBV), which women and girls disproportionately face both in and out of conflict and fragility, and requires a long-term, holistic response, including justice, health-care services, livelihood support, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all survivors.
- **Ensure all British delegations across all UK international engagement, are, at a minimum, 40% composed of women.** Delegations must include women in senior positions and be cognisant of the diverse identities that women hold. Public reporting on gender parity will assess and evaluate whether such commitments are successfully met across all delegations. Gender parity must also include supporting and resourcing the inclusion of women and girls in all their diversity from civil society, unions and movements at high-level meetings and international fora. This is critical given the UK's multilateral leadership role on WPS at the UN, but also in regional institutions such as NATO and others. This is time-sensitive, given the UN General Assembly, The Summit of the Future, COP29 and other global convenings where the UK will be closely observed in the world.

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- **Reinstate annual NAP assessments with a written report to Parliament** after the previous Government in 2023 eroded transparency and accountability by providing a written assessment only once every two years. Reinstating annual assessments will ensure civil society trust, diverse input and meaningful accountability to uphold commitments. This allows for an agile, adaptable NAP on WPS, responding to the external and internal environment.
- **Review UK peace capabilities including the UK Integrated Security Fund.** This should be a precursor to any spending review which can reverse declines in the ability of the UK to address the root causes of conflict, the UK's mediation and negotiation capacity and conflict research. The UK Integrated Security Fund has departed significantly from the role of its predecessor funds, the Conflict Stability and Security Fund and the Conflict Pool created by Labour in 2001. The UK ISF has recently downgraded the prioritisation of Women, Peace and Security and it must be part of this review.
- **Continue to resource the dedicated Gender Peace and Security portfolio, which supports and prioritises the work on gender peace and security, gender equality, women and girls' rights, and women's empowerment work and to support NAP implementation,** in addition to existing peacebuilding resources, in line with its commitments to the WPS agenda, and the International Women and Girls Strategy. The funding must be accessible, flexible, long-term, and core and directly go towards Women's Rights and Women-Led Organizations themselves. The fund should represent a minimum of 15% of all peacebuilding funds (multilateral and bilateral) as called for by the UN Secretary-General.
- **Ensure the UK Government respects the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons,** by repatriating nationals and permanent residents who have been trafficked. The UK has been failing its obligations to bring back its nationals who have been trafficked in conflict and crisis affected communities, and the new Government must respect the Protocol and use this as an opportunity to repatriate these trafficking victims/survivors.
- **Invest in WPS expertise through continuing funding the WPS Helpdesk and resourcing additional gender advisers for in-country teams as well as across all Government departments.** Doing so will bolster the expertise the UK holds, making implementation efficient and cost-effective while contributing to the UK as a global thought leader on WPS and gender equality. This also includes delivering and implementing regular training on gendered conflict analysis and WPS for any staff operating in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States (FCAS), including gender and conflict advisers, thematic experts, and teams at regional desks, posts, country offices, and missions abroad and across FCDO, MoD and other departments where appropriate.
- **Restore the international ODA budget to 0.7% of Gross National Income,** including recommitting 50% of ODA in FCAS, with earmarked flexible and core funding for women-led and women's rights organisations, ensuring that this is indeed international spend rather than used domestically. Reducing the defence budget to benefit the ODA budget would be a clear and unequivocal commitment from the UK that it is investing in peace rather than war.
- **As Ministers and senior officials assess programs and policy decisions, the Minister who sits across FCDO, particularly international development and Women and Equalities must ensure that they include participatory and intersectional gendered conflict sensitive analysis** as a priority step to address the gendered drivers of conflict. This analysis should be recognised as a peacebuilding intervention in and of itself. It must also be applied to and integrated across MoD.