

UK STATEMENT IN WORKING SESSION 9

I would like to focus my intervention this afternoon on the prevention of violence element of our discussion and to share with you an initiative that the United Kingdom has launched to tackle sexual violence in conflict.

The United Kingdom takes the issue of preventing sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations extremely seriously. We are convinced that tackling these atrocities is central to conflict prevention and peace-building in conflict-affected countries.

Sexual violence as part of conflict remains powerfully emotive in nature, with significant consequences. Sexual violence can be used by different parties to conflicts to perpetuate mutual mistrust, hatred and indeed promote further violence. This can result in increased ethnic, sectarian and other divisions, entrenching conflict and instability further. Acts of sexual violence can physically and psychologically injure but also humiliate, degrade and stigmatise. These acts also create psychological and physical health problems for survivors. They can lead to unwanted pregnancy, contraction of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and create other long term health problems. It affects large numbers of women, but also men and children.

In May this year, my Foreign Secretary launched the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative which we will be pursuing intensely including during our Presidency of the G8 group of countries in 2013.

In his speech launching the initiative on 29 May, the Foreign Secretary said:

"It is my firm conviction that tackling sexual violence in conflict is central to conflict prevention and peace-building worldwide.

Where there is no justice the seeds of future conflict are sown, and development is held back.”

“We will not succeed in building sustainable peace in conflict areas unless we give the issue of sexual violence the centrality it deserves...”

The Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative aims to strengthen international efforts and co-ordination to tackle sexual violence, to erode the existing culture of impunity, to increase the number of perpetrators brought to justice both internationally and nationally, and to support states to build capacity.

We want to rally sustained and co-ordinated international action and push this issue up the global agenda over the coming year. Given the OSCE concept of comprehensive security, we believe that working with the organisation and its participating States on this issue could both deepen its impact and help it reach a wider number of countries.

The Initiative is intended to compliment and strengthen the efforts of others already working to tackle these horrific crimes. We have already committed to setting up and deploying a UK Team of Experts to support international and national efforts to tackle sexual violence and its aftermath.

It is relevant that we are discussing this issue today at what is Europe's largest human rights conference. Acts of sexual violence in and after conflict clearly violate fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. We will be looking to secure global agreement to reinforce the unacceptability of sexual violence in conflict and incorporate it fully into global human rights mechanisms.

And we should also remember that the economic cost of sexual violence is high for both the individual and the state: it affects individuals' and survivors' ability to work; increases the cost of providing health services and the ability to deliver justice; and deters investment.

We look forward to working together with colleagues to build a global partnership to prevent sexual violence in conflict. We would be happy to share details of the initiative and to discuss any ideas which colleagues may have to offer in the run up to 2013 to turn this ambition into a reality.