

International women's day: UK statement

Thank you Chair

International Women's Day is a moment to recognise past achievements, and to look ahead to future challenges. A time to reflect on where we are falling short, and on what we can and must do to address these shortcomings. Over the last year, we have all had to respond and adapt to the challenge of a pandemic. And we have depended on our front-line workers to help us through this. Women have been on the frontline in the fight against COVID-19, globally accounting for around 70% of health workers, although only 25% of leadership positions in the health sector. And we've seen women play a leading role in vaccine development.

But during this period we have also seen a shocking increase globally in gender-based and domestic violence, with women and girls accounting for the overwhelming majority of victims. We need to reverse this worrying trend and to face the challenge of achieving gender equality with renewed vigour.

Empowering women and girls, and preventing violence against them, is a UK priority. We are committed to ensuring every girl receives at least 12 years of quality education, and to ending the preventable deaths of mothers, newborn babies and children by 2030. Supporting comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights is fundamental for gender equality: it ensures that all women and girls have control over their own lives and bodies.

One of the themes for this year's International Women's Day is "Choose to Challenge". As we look to a post-pandemic world, we need to ensure that we build back better and more inclusively. We can only fully achieve this if we challenge gender inequality, and put gender equality at the centre of all we do.

At the OSCE, this includes fully implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda, ensuring women are fully, equally and meaningfully included in peace processes and in conflict prevention, and enabling women's economic empowerment. It also means calling out stereotypes and harmful behaviours.

Over the last week, we've focussed on some of these areas. Today I want to speak on two additional ones – intersectionality, and building a resilient future.

Women and girls not only experience inequality and discrimination because of their gender. This can also be compounded by intersecting factors – such as age, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or belief, and many others. To ensure that all women and girls are free from discrimination and violence, and are able to reach their full potential, it is essential to build intersectional approaches into gender equality.

As we look to build a resilient post-pandemic future, one of the immediate challenges we face is that of climate change.

In our COP26 presidency, we will champion inclusivity. We want to see all countries stepping up their commitments to centre gender equality in climate action and finance. The inclusion of diverse views enables innovative solutions and drives better climate outcomes. It can catalyse greater economic opportunities for individuals and communities, improved health and well-being and better management of natural resources. The full, meaningful and equal participation of women in national and local level climate policy development is vital to achieving climate goals. And there is evidence of better outcomes when women are brought into adaptation and resilience action. The lack of deaths following Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua has been ascribed to women's involvement in preparedness education and their monitoring of the hurricane early warning system.

International Women's Day is not just a day. It is about the actions we take every day to ensure the equal rights of all women and girls.