

Press release: Girls' education to be central pillar of UK foreign, development and defence policy

Updated: Added translation

Championing girls' education to promote global stability will be at the heart of UK foreign, development and defence policy to positively transform the lives of women and girls in conflict settings, senior ministers have agreed.

At an event today (16 January) at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt, Minister of State for the FCO and the PM's Special representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon and Defence Minister Mark Lancaster will launch the [UK's fourth national action plan \(NAP\) on women, peace and security](#). The plan sets out how the UK will support women in conflict zones around the world to play an active role in ensuring peace and security in their communities.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

From Somalia to Syria, and from Burma and Afghanistan, women have been instrumental in the development of the UK's national action plan on women, peace and security.

It's a sad truth that women suffer disproportionately all around the world during times of crisis. It's essential to harness the huge potential of the next generation to work towards a more secure, more prosperous future. We know that women can be agents of change which is why DFID is placing women at the very heart of its peace, security, education, and humanitarian programmes.

Minister of State for the FCO and the Prime Minister's Special representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

Conflict affects whole communities, but women and children are often the worst affected.

This year the Foreign Secretary and I will focus on ensuring that girls in the poorest countries in the world receive at least 12 years of quality education because this is the single most powerful spur to development and progress.

Without question women must have a seat at the table. We know that

when women and girls participate in political processes, conflict resolution and mediation their contribution helps to build a more sustainable peace.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster said:

Protecting human rights goes to the very heart of who we are as a nation, and our Armed Forces are leaders in this on an international level.

Our national action plan sets out to create a better future for women across the globe: in which there is zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse, and in which women and men make a full contribution to the peace and security of all.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by conflict and crisis and they are part of the solution. For example, evidence shows that when women participate meaningfully in peace agreements they are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years.

This NAP sets a bold new direction, putting women and girls at the heart of Britain's work to prevent and resolve conflict for the next five years.

Three new countries have been added to the plan Nigeria, South Sudan, Iraq in addition to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Burma and Afghanistan. The NAP sets out that to build sustainable and lasting peace and create stable societies, women around the world must be able to participate in peace processes and peacekeeping missions.

Read the new [national action plan](#).

Notes to editors

- the NAP will focus on 7 strategic outcomes where the UK can really make a difference (decision making; peacekeeping; gender-based violence; humanitarian response; security and justice; preventing and countering violence extremism; and UK capabilities) which are linked to the 4 pillars of Women, Peace and Security (prevention, participation, protection, relief and recovery)
- the NAP is part of the UK government's wider efforts on gender equality, which includes investing in teachers to provide quality education – making sure that children aren't just in school but are learning the foundational skills they need for work and life

- the Ministry of Defence has been training and mentoring thousands of African, Kurdish and Iraqi forces on combatting sexual violence in conflict situations
- through the NAP the UK will tackle violence against women and girls, and will ensure security and justice actors are held accountable to all the populations they serve including women. The UK support is also helping to drive up women's political participation in some of the most challenging contexts across the world
- as part of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, DFID's work is designed to meet the needs of women and girls and insist partners engage with women at all stages of design and delivery
- UK aid for the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh for example is helping provide: access to female bathing cubicles and sanitary items for more than 35,000 girls and women; counselling and psychological support for over 10,000 women suffering from the trauma of war and over 2,000 survivors of sexual violence; and medical help for over 50,000 pregnant women to give birth safely.