

Putting survivors first when combatting conflict-related sexual violence

Mr President, thank you. And it's a delight to join you from London. It's my immense pleasure, an honour to join you again on this very important subject.

I remember a year or so ago working with you, Heiko, on 2467 and the importance that it did bring to bear. I know Angelina Jolie mentioned in her contribution about how important it was putting survivors at the heart of our approach and also the reference to children. And I think that's reflective of the real challenge we have in front of us.

In doing so, I again want to pay especially a tribute to my good friend, SRS G Patten. Pramila, your leadership on this role is exemplary and we look forward to further strengthening your hand and the role of the UN on this important priority for us all.

I also want to record my thanks to the other briefers, to both Miss Ohmar and to Ms Fornel-Poutou for your insights that you brought from specific, live conflict challenges that we're currently facing. Your briefings have really once again set a compelling base and renewed a determination for all of us, I feel, to do so much more.

Amongst my responsibilities as a Minister, as our President today mentioned, I am the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. And I am honoured by the role that I have and the leadership we have been able to show over several years now from the UK in our determination to work together with partners in tackling these appalling, abhorrent crimes. And I'm proud of our record of working together on this.

Since 2012, the UK has committed over £46 million supporting worldwide efforts with a single objective to eradicate this scourge. Yet we continue to witness, as we've heard again today, the suffering experienced by so many survivors. And so we put those survivors at the heart of our efforts. And I'm delighted we have two survivors directly advising me, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister on our efforts on this important priority.

But not only are our efforts to respond effectively and compassionately where incidents occur, but also our efforts must be to stop this happening to anybody else. Accountability, as we've already heard, is a critical part of this. First, because for many, achieving justice is a vital step to the road to recovery. Second, because ending impunity is a crucial deterrent in preventing future violence.

When we look at conflicts of the past in Iraq and Bosnia, we know how long justice can take and continues to take. And that is why the United Kingdom continues to commit to strengthening justice for all survivors and to holding

perpetrators of these horrendous crimes to account. This means upholding the highest international standards of evidence collection. It means aiding efforts to secure convictions. And crucially, it means protecting survivors from further harm when they report crimes and making investigations safer and more ethical.

Pramila, I recall our visit to Iraq when we sat there and met Yazidi victims of the atrocities of Daesh, who had gone through the worst horrors against a person. When you see their eyes, it just compels you. It prioritises in your own mind how much more needs to happen and needs to be done.

And we must tackle the conscious and unconscious bias that still exists within the criminal justice systems and build the capacity of judges and prosecutors to understand the impacts of these crimes.

In light of the current pandemic, this approach is even more urgent. Limited legal services are under strain and diverted government resources have further narrowed the bandwidth for safe, survivor-centred reporting. We also know that survivors' journeys do not end in the courtroom.

And we've heard before and we've heard today from SRS G Patten and Special Envoy Jolie about the importance of supporting – not just talking, but providing and giving. And that's why I am proud to announce the United Kingdom's £1.3 million contribution to the Global Survivors Fund. This fund was launched by Nobel Laureates Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad, whose work has championed reintegration, redress and restorative justice for so many. And we'll also be proud to be working with Nadia Murad on the Murad Code for all those seeking to engage and collect evidence. It supports community action through grassroots organisations and survivors' networks. This fund supports states and civil society to cater to the specific concerns of survivors and communities. And most importantly, as I'm sure everyone acknowledges, it places survivors' voices firmly at the centre of its work, spearheading efforts for a truly survivor-centred approach to justice.

Finally, 15 months since the passing of Security Council Resolution 2467, we must all recognise that the only response to sexual violence is a survivor-centred response. The more we empower survivors to lead, the more effectively we support their reintegration, their recovery and our ability to respond to these abhorrent crimes. This means safeguarding minimum standards for investigation and preventing harm through the Murad Code, through the implementation of the highest standards through the Murad Code. It is supporting all survivors and children born of conflict-related sexual violence. It is funding crucial initiatives, like in South Sudan, that have reached 700,000 women, girls, men and boys to empower survivors and support their recovery. It is about raising awareness of the devastating impact of these crimes and tackling the appalling stigma that too many face. And finally, it is why we must prevent these crimes, including those committed against the youngest and most vulnerable, by supporting international commitments like the Safe Schools Declaration to keep girls and boys safe, secure and successful in their lives.

This year we proudly marked the 20th anniversary of the UN Security Council

Resolution 1325. Conflict-related sexual violence still remains rife. It remains real to so many around the world. We have a collective responsibility to ensure UN Security Council Resolution 2467 becomes an equally historic resolution by holding Member States and the UN accountable to implement our collective obligations.

It is not a minute too soon to turn words and action, ideas into reality and commitments into concrete change. And it is only through concerted, collaborative international effort, we will succeed in eliminating the horror of conflict-related sexual violence. And I continue to look forward to working with partners, with United Nations, but, most importantly, survivors, to put them at the heart of our response.

It is time for justice. It's time to put survivors first.

Thank you, Mr President.