

Speech: DFID Ghana Country Director's speech at Business Cost of Violence Against Women & Girls in Ghana forum

Honourable Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection Distinguished representatives of Government British High Commissioner for Ghana, Members of the Diplomatic Corps Development Partners, academia, representatives of the private sector Traditional leaders, Members of the press. Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Afternoon.

It's great to be here today at the British High Commissioner's Residence to mark the 16 Days of Activism towards ending gender based violence and to launch preliminary findings from the UK aid-funded study on the "Business Costs of Violence Against Women and Girls in Ghana".

35% of women across the world have experienced some form of violence in their lives.

As well as a gross violation in itself, Violence Against Women and Girls also limits individuals, communities and societies.

Girls and women who experience violence are less likely to complete their education, 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV, and are at increased risk of maternal mortality.

For children that see one parent assaulting another, the long-term health and social consequences are similar to those of child abuse and neglect.

For economies, the costs of VAWG are estimated at between 1.2% and 3.7% of GDP. And we will hear more later from Dr Asante and his team on how Violence Against Women impacts on the economy.

In short, violence against women and girls is a global pandemic.

But while the scale of the problem seems daunting, change is possible and is already happening. This year's 16 Days of Activism is occurring at a time when across the world men and women are standing up to address the issue of violence against women.

The #MeToo movement has gone viral. The hashtag has been used by more than 4.7 million people in 12 million posts. It has trended in at least 85 countries. For too long, violence against women, including sexual harassment and assault, has been unspoken, private, something to be ashamed of. This campaign has succeeded in breaking the silence – providing us with a real sense of the magnitude, and the shocking scale and reach of the phenomenon in both public and private spheres across the world.

And it has opened up a global conversation about men's behaviour towards women.

Ladies and Gentlemen The UK is proud to be a global leader in efforts to eradicate violence against women and girls in all its forms. This includes support to women's rights organisations; tackling the attitudes that make violent behaviour seem normal; getting comprehensive services to those who have experienced violence; and ensuring that national legislation and policies are in place and implemented.

DFID currently works across 12 countries – including Ghana – to tackle Child Early and Forced Marriage – a £39m programme funded by the UK taxpayer. We continue to build on the momentum of the 2014 Girl Summit by supporting new international resolutions on Child Marriage.

The UK also provided financial and technical support to government for the 2016 Domestic Violence in Ghana Survey.

Our new Secretary of State announced last week a £12 million package to help around 750,000 women and girls globally over the next three years.

Studies reveal that in Ghana VAWG is deep-rooted and widespread. We know from a UK aid funded Domestic Violence in Ghana survey that an estimated 71.5% of women and 71.4% of men reported having experienced at least one form of violence (domestic and non-domestic) over their lifetime. A number of other harmful traditional practices still exist in Ghana, including female ritual slavery, FGM, Child Early Forced Marriage, widowhood rites and witch's camps.

We appreciate that the Government, under the leadership of the Honourable Minister, is actively addressing these challenges – through the work of the Domestic Violence Secretariat, and ongoing reforms are being put in place to tackle violence against women. For example, laws have been passed on inheritance rights, FGM, the Children's Act (1998), Human Trafficking Act (2005), Domestic Violence Act (2007).

I mentioned earlier the UK's global lead in efforts to address VAWG.

Ghana could also be a global leader on this issue. In the past week His Excellency the President has passionately espoused the need for African countries to grow "beyond aid". The President is championing gender equality and ensured that women are represented at the very highest levels in his government with 29 female parliamentarians and 20 female Ministers and Deputy Ministers.

The President is also the AU Gender Champion and Co-chair of Advocates for the SDGs.

Ghana, as it prepares to organise a Girls' Summit in 2018, could take a leadership role in addressing VAWG across the region, if not the continent. The UK stands ready to support this.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today, the Institute for Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) – University of Ghana – will present preliminary findings from a survey conducted among 100 businesses in Ghana assessing how domestic violence impacts businesses.

The UK aid-funded research looking at the Economic and Social Costs of Violence against Women and Girls is a three year multi-country project that estimates the costs of violence, both social and economic, to individuals and households, businesses and communities in Ghana, Pakistan and South Sudan. As we stand here this afternoon, people are similarly gathered – but in a much colder London – to launch the findings from South Sudan.

No such analysis has previously been carried out in Ghana, or indeed elsewhere in West Africa. The impact of the Ghana study, once assessed, is therefore likely to be significant – with the new data helping us better understand the impact of Violence Against Women on community cohesion, economic stability and development and providing further evidence for government to accelerate efforts to address Violence Against Women.

Before I hand over to the Honourable Minister to say a few words, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister for agreeing to assume the Chairmanship of the National Advisory Board (NAB) – the body which will ensure that the research is used effectively to advocate for increased resources and emphasis on the elimination of violence against women in Ghana.

In conclusion, I'd like us all to remain alert to the fact that VAWG is present in our homes and our work places. With the #MeToo movement in mind, let us create opportunities to break the silence, opened up a conversation about men's behaviour towards women, and be bold for change in order to end the violence.

I'd now like to introduce the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection – Honourable Otiko Afisa Djaba.

Thank You.