

Speech: Lord Ahmad speech marking International Women's Day 2019

Your Royal Highness, your Excellency, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a huge honour and great privilege for me to be here today. I offer my sincere thanks to Her Royal Highness, The Countess of Wessex for your support and indeed for acting as our process host today.

Even more importantly, I thank you for associating yourself with what you rightly describe as "the cause" of Women, Peace and Security.

It is undoubtedly a truly worthy cause, and one in which the United Kingdom is proud to be taking a leading role.

So I am equally delighted, your Royal Highness that you have agreed to become a champion for it. Your established international profile, your insights as I've already found invaluable, in helping amplify the voices of women peacebuilders around the world.

And therefore I look forward to working closely with you – starting with a very busy two days we've got planned in New York next week.

I am also delighted and pleased that we will be joined there by Visaka, who has just shared her moving testimony with us today.

If I may Visaka, as I said to you before we entered this hall – your courage, your inspiration, your determination and leadership is an inspiration to us all. If I may, I was particularly struck by how you were not satisfied with peacebuilding on your own doorstep, as you said the conflict came to your doorstep: but you wanted to share your experiences with others around the world.

And I know that your work, your inspiration across the globe through networks, alliances and sisterhoods, with a few brothers thrown in as well, sharing your experience, courage and strength. We are pleased we are lending this experience to the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth Initiative, which the UK is delighted to be supporting.

2020 Anniversary

Voices like yours, and the voices of many here today and beyond, will be crucial in determining what we collectively seek to achieve in the lead-up to the twentieth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 18 months' time.

Quite rightly, the people driving the agenda are those with first-hand experience, primary experience of understanding conflict.

If our troubled world is to enjoy lasting peace, it is vital that women have the agency, that their voices are heard and there is a real gender

perspective which is integrated not into partially our work, into all our work.

If I may now, more than ever before, the world needs women to lend their insights, their experience and valuable perspectives to efforts to tackle conflict.

Support for Peacebuilding

There are across the world so many women around the world who like Visaka, have the motivation, skills and tenacity to help build sustainable peace, and indeed bring stability and prosperity across different communities.

I have had the great honour, indeed privilege to have met some incredibly inspiring women on my travels, working to bring peace in some of the most challenging, the world's most hostile environments. Indeed some of them we welcome here today. May I take this opportunity again to salute your courage, your energy, your inspiration, and example and indeed determination in seeking peace across the globe.

Each and every one of you are living proof that no woman needs to be 'given' a voice. You have a voice. What matters is that voice is heard, and that the world listens to what you have to say.

That is why we must use all the tools at our disposal to identify these incredible women, give them greater profile, and amplify their voices, so that they can put their unique qualities to work by engaging meaningfully in peacebuilding.

And that is why your Royal Highness, I welcome your voice to this cause. It will be a voice which will be an inspiration to so many across the globe.

Conclusion

To conclude if I may – I wish to thank you once again your Royal Highness for agreeing to champion the work and joining with these courageous women from across the globe. Bringing your convening power and personal passion and determination which I've already seen, will be inspirational for us all. And I also thank all of you, many of you I've worked with on this important agenda for your collaboration, your commitment, at times in the early months your persuasion and utmost dedication to the cause of Women Peace and Security. And I'm proud that I'm part of that cause.

To finish though, it is our collective responsibility it is our common duty to ensure that we all do our part to ensure Women's voices are heard. I know, as we've already seen, Her Royal Highness, The Countess of Wessex I myself as a Minister responsible in Her Majesty's Government and the Prime Minister's Special Representative for preventing sexual violence. The whole of her majesty's government, our country, the United Kingdom are all committed to this goal. Indeed, each and every one of us in this room and beyond are committed to achieving virtuous and noble goals in this cause. So my final point is this, let us all work together, collaboratively and collectively and

lets go ahead and deliver it.