

Speech: Lord Ahmad's speech on Global Peacekeeping Reform in Ghana

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the Minister for Defence, the Honourable Mr Dominic Nitiwul for hosting this event.

His Excellency Kofi Annan was a trailblazer – the first UN career official to be appointed Secretary-General and the first from Sub-Saharan Africa. This training centre which bears his name is also blazing a trail. It is at the cutting edge of peace support training and education in Africa, and the only centre of its kind on the continent to have a dedicated institute for Women, Peace and Security. Over fifteen thousand students from around the world have trained here since 2004. That's an impressive contribution to global peacekeeping. It's typical of Ghana's commitment to UN Peacekeeping, from Congo in the 1960s, to South Sudan today – Ghana has always been in the top tier of countries contributing peacekeepers. Back in 2015, when President Obama called on fellow leaders at the UN to commit more resources to peacekeeping operations, Ghana once again answered the call.

It is also typical of the contribution of other African nations. Currently almost half of the men and women in uniform at Peacekeeping missions around the world are African. I want to pay tribute to your commitment, and to remember those peacekeepers who have given their lives for peace.

Today I want to look to the future. I want to talk about the UK's commitment to better peacekeeping and the 3Ps reform agenda. I want to talk about our work on ending sexual violence and stigma. And finally I want to talk about getting more women involved in peacekeeping, and gender issues more broadly.

UK Support for Peacekeeping

The United Kingdom is a long-standing supporter of peacekeeping, although compared to Ghana I recognise that our contribution of troops is still modest. Today, we have around seven hundred British soldiers in blue berets. We have doubled our contribution since committing to do so two years ago, with two new deployments to UN missions in Somalia and South Sudan: our first in two decades.

UK Support for Reform – 3Ps

The UK is also committed to better peacekeeping. The joint Communiqué signed at the London Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial last September is a blueprint for peacekeeping reform.

It calls for improvement in three areas – the 3Ps of peacekeeping – planning, pledges and performance.

Planning

Better planning is about ensuring better coordination across the UN system so that we can get the right missions with the right skills deployed to the right place at the right time. The UK has invested significantly in the Secretary General's Strategic Planning and Analysis Unit, which has led to advances in the UN's ability to identify the needs of missions, and match them with the capabilities offered by member states.

Pledges

Pledges are about helping the UN to identify and meet the specific needs of each mission. In November the UK will co-host Canada's Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in Vancouver. We will explore smart pledging and innovations in training; look at how we protect those at risk; and consider a rapid response to the early warning signs of conflict.

Performance

Finally, having the right plan and the right people in place only works if they perform effectively. That's why performance is so important. We need to see strong leadership of peacekeeping mission and ensure that troops are doing the job they have been sent to do. The UN needs to be able to take action against troops who do not meet this standard.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

When that performance falls below the level that is expected it puts the mission at risk. It can also bring the mission and the UN into disrepute. Such is the case with the appalling sexual abuse, committed by a small number of peacekeepers against the people they were sent to protect. Such crimes are abhorrent; they cannot be allowed to continue.

As the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence, as well as Minister for the UN, I applaud the efforts of Ghana and of this Centre in particular, to tackle this difficult issue, through courses addressing the challenges of preventing sexual violence in conflict. We want to see more coordination between member states that need training and those that can offer it.

For our part, I am proud that the UK has delivered training for more than seven thousand African peacekeepers each year since 2014, on gender issues and the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence. We must do everything possible to improve the performance of peacekeepers and to ensure they properly protect the people in their care.

I know Secretary-General Guterres is reviewing the UN's peace and conflict prevention structures. I hope his recommendations will lead to improvements in planning, pledges and performance.

Women's Rights

I want to turn now to the role of women. Safeguarding women's rights; ensuring that they take part in political processes; and that they participate fully in conflict resolution are all priorities for the United Kingdom. We have given the UN £2m to help achieve this aim.

Tackling Stigma

I spoke earlier about my particular role with regard to preventing sexual violence. One of my priorities is tackling the stigma that many survivors of sexual violence face. The UK is developing a set of Principles for Global Action, to help policy makers understand how they can incorporate this critical issue into their own work. I look forward to working with Ghana on this initiative.

Women in Peacekeeping

I also hope that we can follow your example of deploying women at all levels in peacekeeping missions. One in ten of Ghana's peacekeepers are women, the highest percentage of the top 10 troop contributing nations. I am sure this is down to the excellent training this centre provides. This, and the Women, Peace and Security Institute here, demonstrate Ghana's commitment to this issue.

By way of comparison, 7% of UK Peacekeepers are women. We are working hard to increase that number and I am very pleased that we will have a female commanding officer leading our troops in South Sudan.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope I have shown you the UK's commitment to working for better peacekeeping. It is a privilege to be discussing it with you – in a centre dedicated to doing just that. With the growing demands on peacekeeping, it is more important than ever that we work together to make the UN system and our missions as effective as they can be. I look forward to hearing about your experiences and your views on how we can tackle the many challenges ahead. Thank you.