

# Speech: Penny Mordaunt on improving sexual health rights globally

Thank you everyone for being here and thank you to Canada for hosting us.

A lot of people have thanked me for coming along today because they know the turmoil that Parliament is in, all the stresses and strains that are going on and it is difficult times that is for sure. And quite a lot of people say to me how do you keep going, why have you stuck with it, why have you stayed there. I say something like it is my duty, the country needs us to find a way through, we need to hold Remainers and Brexiteers together. But the real reason is that I want to stay in post to attend Women Deliver.

It is fantastic today to be able to celebrate our partnership on gender equality, announced by our Prime Ministers in 2017.

It is wonderful to be amongst so many amazing women who it is my privilege to know a few of you and the amazing work you do. And also some amazing men as well. Dom McVey, a CDC supported entrepreneur who has done fantastic work on women's economic empowerment and now is launching some new initiatives to help end period poverty worldwide. Thank you to all the fellas who are also doing their bit too.

And there is a lot to celebrate. In the UK the female employment rate is at a record high and the gender pay gap is at a record low. We've introduced new laws to protect women from domestic abuse, FGM, stalking, and forced marriage.

My department, the Government Equalities Office, this month moved into the Cabinet Office, the hub and the heart of Whitehall to really ensure that we are delivering. And the only female mouser the Cabinet Office cat, has received a promotion too.

Meanwhile, in Canada you have created a Department for Women and Gender Equality. You have made gender budgeting a mandatory part of the federal budget-making process, and delivering your strategy to prevent gender-based violence, and have recently passed into law protections for pay equality, based on the UK's gender pay gap reporting, I am delighted at that.

But all too often, in too much of the world, women's rights are actually being rolled back. Britain and Canada has shown real leadership together on this issue and that leadership is needed now more than ever.

Millions of girls and women are living in poverty, denied an education, have inadequate healthcare, are routinely assaulted, unable to live full and happy lives. And no country has yet achieved gender equality.

The Sustainable Development Goals are a vital way to drive and measure change. This year, the UK will be reporting on our progress towards implementing them, as part of our Voluntary National Review.

Global Goal 5, on gender equality, is critical in and of itself, but without it we will never be able to deliver on the other goals. Everyone, whatever their gender, has a stake in gender equality.

Domestically and overseas, the UK is championing efforts to better understand the situation of the poorest and most marginalised women. Just last month, I announced vital new work to end period poverty and shame in the UK and overseas. I also announced our upcoming strategy to ensure that every woman in the UK has freedom, choice, capacity, resilience, support, and protection to do whatever she wants to do.

Freedom and choice are guiding principles for all our gender equality work. There are people around the world who want to control women, who want to restrict their choices and deny them their rights.

That's why it is so important that we use platforms like Women Deliver continually to renew our commitment to women's rights and specifically to comprehensive sexual and reproductive rights for all women.

Leadership means not shying away from the issues of access to safe abortion, when the evidence shows us that these services save women's lives.

Comprehensive Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) is an area where the UK and Canada are continuing to deepen our partnership as likeminded leaders in this field.

In January this year, we co-hosted a multi sector Safe Abortion dialogue here in London to drive progress and momentum in this absolutely critical area.

And at the Commission on the Status of Women last month we held a strong line together, resisting the "pushback" as the Secretary General called it.

We are united in our efforts to work with the most complex and challenging issues that threaten women's health and lives when others are shying away from them and I thank Canada for their leadership in this area.

Everyone should have control over their own bodies and their own futures. That means every girl and every woman having access to the information they need, the freedom to choose what's right for them, and the services and support they need to make their own decisions.

I am proud that thanks to UK aid, millions of women in the world's poorest countries are able access the desperately-needed sexual and reproductive health services they need and want to use. The UK has been a world leader in this area and will proudly continue to be one.

My Department is also supporting the deepening of civil society partnerships through our UK aid Connect programme.

A new £42 million programme looking at SRHR will support two consortia of NGO partners on this theme, and I am pleased to announce that these will be led by Marie Stopes International and the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

This programme will drive innovation and learning by bringing diverse partners together to work on complex and neglected issues such as increasing access to safe abortion and improving the provision of SRHR in crisis settings.

Some of the most marginalised women and girls in the world are those living in conflict and crisis areas. Together we are pushing for a humanitarian system that responds to women and girls' specific needs, but also sees them as active agents of change.

We worked closely with Canada to develop the landmark G7 Whistler Declaration on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action.

We are now teaming up to implement these commitments, including through the Call to Action on Protection from Gender Based Violence in Emergencies.

Successful societies are those where women have control over their own bodies, are places where every mother can enjoy a wanted and healthy pregnancy, where every child can live beyond their fifth birthday, where no woman or girl is forced to marry before she is ready.

Together with our partners, including Canada, we are supporting the UNICEF and UNFPA global programme, working to end child marriage, reaching millions of adolescent girls across 12 countries, and have co-sponsored every UN resolution on ending child marriage.

We will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with Canada on the international stage to realise the rights of all the world's women and girls.

This was demonstrated recently at a joint side event at the Commission on the Status of Women on LGBT rights. I look forwards to deepening our collaboration through Women Deliver and beyond.

We must empower women to make their own decisions. We must give women the freedom to choose what is right for them.

We must invest in them so that they can complete their education and fulfil their full potential.

And we should recognise gender equality as one of the great human rights issues of our time.

Thank you.