

Speech: Penny Mordaunt speech at launch of National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security.

I want to start by telling you a personal story about a woman I met a couple of years ago.

Her name is Zara and she was the first woman to graduate from the ANAOA, the Afghan army's officer training academy, and she was in the first cohort of women to go through the officer training programme. And on graduation she won the sword of honour.

To do that she would have had to have sought permission from every male member of her family to join the armed forces, she would have had to endure a very arduous training regime in some very challenging circumstances, whilst raising a child. And she would have faced discrimination and immense challenges.

When I first saw the women training some time before I met Zara, they were training behind a brick wall because they were not allowed to integrate with the men.

And I asked her- what had been her motivation? Why had she done so much? Why had she challenged herself so much? And why had she put up with so much?

And she said- because I have a stake, and I have a child. I love my country and I want to shape it and I want to protect those and what I love.

Whether it's voting or having a say, whether it's being able to contribute because all your talents have been enabled to flourish. Whether it is being able to live your life to the full because you have control over it, or security. And whether it is being able to defend yourself and those who you love.

All of those things we must ensure that women, wherever they are, are able to do so.

And there is still so much to do. In particular in conflict situations.

Now I know I am preaching to the choir here. But I just want to illustrate this point. I'm told that at this event today there are 150 people.

And if I ask this room to pretend for a moment that you were the world's female population. And I asked you how many of you had suffered either physical or sexual violence and I asked you to stand up, 50 of you would be standing.

If I got you to imagine that you were the female population of South Sudan and I asked you the same question, 100 of you would be standing.

And If I asked you to imagine you were the female population of Afghanistan, where Zara comes from, 130 of you would be on your feet.

So there is still much to do. But we are increasingly seeing that women, when they wield power in places of conflict, they are capable of bringing about extraordinary change.

When women have a seat at the negotiating table, security improves. Peace lasts longer. 35% longer. But other development initiatives also become more effective.

The Women, Peace and Security agenda benefits everyone – from the local community to national government and everyone in between.

Peace brings stability. Stability attracts business. And business creates prosperity, which transforms lives and economies.

This agenda isn't just the right thing to do. It's the smart thing to do. It is the entire margin of victory. Its benefits ripple out to the wider world. And make no mistake – a safer world means a safer UK.

This spirit of participation – this principle of women as agents of change – lies at the heart of the new National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

From Somalia to Syria, from Burma to Afghanistan, women have been instrumental in the development of the plan. And I am proud to help launch it today.

The National Action Plan will place women at the very centre of DFID's peace, security and humanitarian programmes.

This means taking proper account of women's needs in conflict zones.

But it also means recognising the valuable role women play as decision-makers and leaders.

And crucially, it means ensuring women are involved in planning at every stage.

And that is why I insist that organisations we fund ensure that women's needs are met and their participation is in every aspect of our humanitarian response.

When it comes to women in conflict zones, the message of DFID and our partners is simple:

We will listen. And we will act.

Because only by unlocking women's potential will we build a safer, more peaceful and more prosperous world for us all. We owe that to Zara and we owe that to every woman on Earth.

Thank you.