

UK calls for global action to end the stigma faced by children born of sexual violence in conflict

The international community must step up to protect the rights and improve the lives of children born from sexual violence in conflict, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and Minister of State will say today (Monday 22 November) at a special event at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

There are no official statistics on the number of children born each year as a result of sexual violence in conflict, but we know it is a widespread issue in wars around the world. The UN estimates that more than 60,000 women were raped during the civil war in Sierra Leone, up to 60,000 in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and at least 200,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1998. Children born of sexual violence in conflict miss out on education and health services because it is often not possible for them to be registered at birth. They and their mothers also face stigma and being ostracised from society.

Today Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, will speak at an event that will be attended by the UN, international partners, NGOs, academics and campaigners such as Lejla Damon, who was born of sexual violence during the Balkan conflict.

He will call on countries around the world to endorse a UK-led call to action and commit to working together to:

- Raise awareness about the challenges faced by children born of sexual violence
- Consider the needs of these children and their mothers and change laws, policies and practices that prevent them from realising their rights and living life to the fullest.

Over the next few months, the UK will be working with those who endorse the call to action, including countries with high incidences of sexual violence in conflict, to develop concrete commitments. The call to action has already been endorsed by the United States, Norway, South Sudan, Mexico and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Lord Ahmad said:

All children deserve the right to an education and quality health services, but all too often those born of sexual violence in conflict face rejection from their communities and struggle to

obtain the identity documents needed to access services.

The UK is a world leader on championing the rights of survivors of sexual violence in conflict. I am pushing for global action so that the rights of these children are fully recognised and they are supported to have the dignified life they deserve as their country's potential future teachers, doctors and entrepreneurs.

Following this call to action, the UK will publish a handbook providing expert advice to help affected countries ensure their laws, policies and practices meet the needs of children born of sexual violence in conflict and their mothers. This will set the gold standard of care and support and will assist countries to comply with their obligations under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. The call to action and handbook will provide the foundation blocks to help to change the way countries and communities support these children and the daily life of survivors.

The call to action follows the Foreign Secretary's push to make sexual violence in conflict a red line for the international community. The UK will host a global summit to unite world around action to prevent sexual violence in conflict next year.

- The Foreign Secretary Liz Truss last week launched a major global campaign to stop sexual violence against women and girls in conflict around the world.
- The Foreign Secretary's campaign will build on work started by her predecessor William Hague, who set up the Preventing Violence in Sexual Conflict Initiative with UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie in 2012. Lord Ahmad, the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, works directly with the Foreign Secretary on this initiative.
- The UK will host a global conference next year to unite the world in action to prevent sexual violence in conflict. The conference will bring together Foreign Ministers from all over the world in support of the campaign to end impunity for violence against women and girls.
- The UK is already supporting change at a community level through organisations like World Vision. The programme is working in the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan to end the stigma faced by survivors of sexual violence and children born as a result. Through the programme, faith leaders are helping to identify and address continued challenges to the acceptance, well-being and empowerment of survivors and children born of sexual violence. The principles of the UK-led Declaration of Humanity are the cornerstone of the project, with an emphasis on ensuring children's and survivors' voices are heard and listened to in the community.
- Later this year, the UN Secretary-General will be issuing a Special Report on the rights of and challenges facing children born of sexual violence and women who bore them. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General is leading on the collation of this report.