

UK government and Nobel Prize winner launch global code to tackle conflict-related sexual violence

- the UK government, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad and Institute for International Criminal Investigations to launch global code of conduct with focus on better gathering of information about conflict-related sexual violence from survivors
- the Murad Code aims to ensure survivors can have their experiences recorded safely, in a way that respects their wishes and human rights, improves the chance of justice and reduces trauma
- the government is committed to improving the global response to sexual violence in areas of conflict around the world, amid reports of rape following Russia's invasion of Ukraine

The UK government, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad and Institute for International Criminal Investigations will today (Wednesday 13 April) set out a new global code of conduct to improve the gathering and use of information about and pursuit of justice for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

The Murad Code – backed by UK funding and developed in partnership with campaign group Nadia's Initiative and the Institute for International Criminal Investigations – sets out minimum standards on how to safely and effectively collect evidence from survivors and witnesses on sexual violence in conflicts and other settings. The aim is for it to be recognised as the gold standard across the world.

Murad will make the announcement alongside Lord Tariq Ahmad, the UK Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict at a meeting of the UN Security Council in New York.

The UK is President of the Security Council throughout April and invited Nadia Murad, herself a survivor of sexual violence in Iraq and a vocal campaigner for others, to address the Council.

It comes amid reports of sexual violence following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Last week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told the Security Council that Russian forces in Bucha had gang-raped women, including in front of their children.

Investigations and testimonies from survivors are essential to hold perpetrators of CRSV to account, but they must be undertaken in a safe and

ethical manner.

The Murad Code brings together existing minimum standards into one code that reduces the risk of survivors suffering further trauma in providing evidence.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

It is absolutely unacceptable that sexual violence and rape are happening in conflicts around the world, and ending it is one of my top priorities.

I am appalled by the growing number of reports of sexual violence by Russian forces emerging from the conflict in Ukraine. The launch of the Murad Code is a vital step towards helping and supporting survivors and bringing perpetrators to justice for their crimes.

Since 2012, the UK has committed over £50 million to preventing sexual violence in conflict globally.

In conflict settings, rape and other forms of sexual violence can be a war crime, a crime against humanity and a form of torture. It is prohibited under international humanitarian law, international criminal law, international human rights law and UN Security Council resolutions.

Lord Ahmad said:

I am proud and humbled to join Nadia's Initiative and the Institute for International Criminal Investigations in releasing the Murad Code.

It is a global code of conduct for the collection of information and evidence from survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

It has been shaped by survivors, governments, international organisations and civil society groups.

As it is our responsibility to place survivors' needs at the heart of our work, I urge everyone involved in documenting and investigating conflict-related sexual violence to follow the Murad Code. In fact, go further – it should become the gold standard for any NGO, government agency or charity in the field.

Nadia Murad said:

Efforts to end sexual violence are gaining momentum, in large part thanks to brave survivors around the world who have shared their stories. But too often, reporting sexual violence has negative consequences for survivors.

The Murad Code lays out clear and practical guidelines for centering the needs of survivors when collecting evidence, and ensuring that they receive justice and support, rather than repercussions. Survivors deserve at least that.

The Foreign Secretary has committed to step up UK action to tackle the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence and to leading a campaign to make sexual violence an international red line in war, on a par in abhorrence with the use of chemical weapons.

From 28 to 30 November 2022, the government will host an international conference London, marking ten years since the launch of the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative.

The conference will bring together the UK and its partners around the world to review progress made, identify shared challenges and agree further action.

The government is also exploring other options for strengthening the international response to conflict-related sexual violence, including a new international Convention that could help hold perpetrators to account.

Notes to editors:

- Nadia Murad is the founder and president of Nadia's Initiative, a non-profit dedicated to rebuilding communities in crisis and advocating for survivors of sexual violence
- Nadia's life was brutally disrupted in 2014 when ISIS attacked her homeland in Sinjar, Iraq Since Nadia's escape from ISIS captivity, she has become a powerful advocate for women in conflict settings and survivors of sexual violence worldwide
- in 2018, Nadia Murad and Denis Mukwege were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for "their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict". She is the first Iraqi and Yazidi to be awarded a Nobel Prize
- Nadia's Initiative's current work is focused on the sustainable re-development of the Yazidi homeland in Sinjar and pursuing holistic justice for survivors of ISIS atrocities
- the Institute for International Criminal Investigations (IICI) is an independent, not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation providing criminal justice and human rights professionals with the training and knowledge necessary to investigate war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide and the most serious human rights violations
- the UK launched a £10 million civil society fund this month to support organisations in Ukraine, including those helping women and girls and people affected by conflict-related sexual violence. *sexual violence in conflict leaves profound and lasting scars on survivors, their children and their communities. During a speech at 44th Session of the Human Rights Council, a survivor from the Democratic Republic of Congo said: "To be raped is synonymous with several words; it is to be dead in one's own flesh, one's soul, with a broken and irreparable heart"