

UK launches landmark draft 'Murad Code' to support survivors of conflict-related sexual violence as COVID-19 pandemic increases suffering

Speaking at the event, the UK's Minister of State for Human Rights Lord Ahmad, said:

We are determined to tackle these most abhorrent of crimes. The UK remains committed to take action – action to prevent violence, action to support survivors and tackle the stigma they face – the appalling sense of stigma – and action to hold perpetrators to account.

Yet, as we mark this important day, we know that conflict-related sexual violence is a pandemic we have yet to cure.

COVID-19 is an unprecedented threat to how we respond to these crimes. The impacts of this pandemic are stark.

Crucial medical and psychological services are directly at risk, as governments divert resources towards their response. Restrictions on movement limit physical routes for survivors to report crimes, or indeed to move to safety. Stay-at-home measures mean those in abusive situations are even more vulnerable to violence.

These are exceptional times. We must provide an exceptional response.

“That is why I am delighted, on behalf of the UK today, to announce that we are launching the draft Murad Code for global consultation. Developed with Nobel Peace Laureate, the courageous and incredible Nadia Murad, this code of conduct puts survivors rightly at the heart of our collective response.

It seeks to uphold international standards for recording the sensitive nature of sexual violence crimes. It prevents the further traumatising of survivors by ensuring that governments, international organisations, and indeed civil society actors adhere to the principles of the Code. It reinforces evidence collection, strengthening justice and accountability.

In light of this pandemic, the Murad Code is all the more urgent and important. Limited legal services are under increasing strain, and diverted government facilities and personnel have narrowed the bandwidth for safe, survivor-centred reporting and collection of evidence.

To succeed in eliminating the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence, more than ever today, now, in these most unusual and unprecedented of times, we must continue to work together to put survivors at the heart of all our work.

Lord Ahmad also urged UN members to consult and collaborate on the Murad Code, building international consensus to eradicate rape and other forms of sexual violence as weapons of war, and to give support in ways led by survivors themselves.