

UK leads global action to tackle sexual violence in conflict

- The Foreign Secretary will announce new support to prevent sexual violence in conflict today (November 28) as he hosts an international conference in London.
- James Cleverly will also launch a new three-year strategy putting survivors at the centre of tackling this abhorrent crime around the world.
- Attendees will include Nadia Murad, a survivor of sexual violence in conflict, her fellow Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr Denis Mukwege, and HRH The Countess of Wessex.
- Angelina Jolie will deliver a video message at the conference.

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly is bringing representatives of around 70 countries together today, to drive forward urgent action to tackle the scourge of sexual violence in conflict – including in Ukraine, Ethiopia and Colombia.

New evidence has shown that an estimated 20 to 30 per cent of women and girls in conflict-affected settings experience sexual violence.

The two-day conference in London this week (28-29 November) will put survivors of this abhorrent crime at the centre of the global response.

Nadia Murad and Dr Denis Mukwege – who won a joint Nobel Peace Prize for their work to combat sexual violence – will be in attendance alongside the Countess of Wessex and International Criminal Court prosecutor Karim Khan. Other survivors, government ministers and representatives of NGOs will also be there to share what they have learned and agree a united response to prevent atrocities from taking place in future.

This week's conference marks 10 years of the UK Government's landmark Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI).

When opening the conference, the Foreign Secretary will announce a new three-year strategy to tackle sexual violence in conflict which will be backed by up to £12.5 million of new funding.

Developed with survivors, experts in the field, parliamentarians, academics, and NGOs, the strategy focuses on tackling these crimes in seven key countries: Ukraine, Bosnia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq and South Sudan.

Addressing the conference, Foreign Secretary James Cleverly is expected to say:

The very threat of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war should bring immediate international condemnation, and swift action

to stop those attacks before they start.

So today, we stand in solidarity, to support survivors and to bring justice. But also to send an unequivocal message to those who order, allow or perpetrate sexual violence: we will not tolerate it and we will push for perpetrators to be prosecuted.

Along with the strategy, the Foreign Secretary will also launch:

- A new partnership between the UK Government and the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, which could use virtual reality technology to make survivors' experience in court less traumatic.
- A new Accountability Commission and Task Force (ACT) for Survivors initiative, developed by the UK to increase successful prosecutions and strengthen other forms of justice. It will provide support for countries with high levels of sexual violence in conflict, to strengthen their national justice systems so they are fit for purpose. This could include mentoring for prosecutors, setting up rapid response mechanisms in crises, and training and support from the UN Team of Experts.
- A new 'What Works To Prevent Violence' report which lays out the scale of the issue and puts forward methods, based on evidence, to prevent them. The first phase of the UK's 'What Works to Prevent Violence' programme has shown reductions in violence of around 50%, even in the most challenging circumstances.
- Work to translate commitments into action to promote the rights and wellbeing of children born as a result of conflict-related sexual violence. This could include improving national laws, policies and practices.

The UK has been at the vanguard of efforts to combat conflict-related sexual violence for the past decade, ever since former Foreign Secretary William Hague and Angelina Jolie jointly launched PSVI in 2012. Angelina Jolie will deliver a video message at the conference, and Lord Hague will speak in person on the 29th.

Since then, the UK has supported nearly 100 projects across 29 countries – from safe shelters in Bosnia, to judicial support in Iraq and Colombia, and training for peacekeepers in East Africa.

The current situation in Ukraine, as well as recent events in Afghanistan and Ethiopia, demonstrate that work to combat conflict-related sexual violence is still as important as ever.

Last week the Foreign Secretary announced on a visit to Ukraine an additional

£3.45m towards projects in the country and the wider region, much of which will go towards addressing sexual and reproductive health.

FCDO Minister of State, Lord (Tariq) of Wimbledon, the Prime Minister's Special Representative for the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) and Co-Host of the Conference:

Hearing from survivors of sexual violence in conflict inspires us, as they show incredible courage, in providing chilling testimonies of why we must all stand up for survivors, with survivors. Sexual violence is something no person should face in any circumstance. Yet we know that in 2021, tragically, it was perpetrated in at least 18 countries. This must stop.

Thanks to the guidance of survivors, working with many allies over the 10 years since we launched the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, we have made some good progress, but we ALL must recognise that more needs to be done to prevent this abhorrent crime, including its use as weapon of war. We know that support and justice is vital for survivors and that perpetrators of these crimes must be fully held to account. We will accelerate this work globally by strengthening our response, so that we put survivors at the heart of everything we do.

In a message to the conference Angelina Jolie will say:

When human beings are physically assaulted in this way, and in some countries for decades, there has to be a decisive global response. When there isn't, it sends a message to both the victim and the perpetrator that we don't truly regard this as a significant crime that needs to be punished and prevented. So this conference should in my view, take a hard look at what has succeeded and what has not.

Dr. Mukwege, Medical Director at Panzi Hospital and 2018 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, said:

The PSVI Conference is organised so that all of us attending in London can listen to survivors' voices. This is not the first conference where survivors have spoken up demanding justice, but I hope it will be one of the last – we need to attend as we count down to end wartime sexual violence.

We are all here today because of survivors. All of them attending this conference represent thousands of others awaiting care, justice and reparations. Very few survivors have received the holistic care – including justice – that they deserve. As the survivors are sharing their recommendations, requests, and

opinions, I ask everyone not only to listen to them but also pledge a commitment to act and support their demands.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad said:

It's time to use every tool we have: sanctions, international trials, and universal jurisdiction to show that sexual violence in conflict will not be tolerated.

We must make state and non-state actors think twice about the consequences of these crimes. Ending the status quo of impunity is essential for preventing people around the world from being subjected to experiences like mine.