

# When we challenge discrimination and progress gender equality, everybody benefits: UK statement at UN Third Committee

Thank you Mr Chair,

Multiple and interconnected barriers are preventing women and girls from reaching their full potential. Where women and girls are unable to reach their potential, whole countries suffer. We know that when we challenge discrimination and progress gender equality, everybody benefits.

The UK is committed to protecting and promoting women and girls' rights and freedoms at home and abroad so that they can have their voice, choice and control over all aspects of their lives.

Women's rights are human rights, as enshrined by numerous conventions that the UK supports. Our ambition remains higher than ever, and we cannot be complacent when reviewing our progress.

That is why we have committed to placing women and girls at the heart of our foreign and development policy, prioritising action on 3 areas: Educating girls; Empowering women and girls; and Ending violence.

We know that achieving gender equality is fundamental to building democracies and accelerating progress on securing freedoms, prosperity and trade, as well as strengthening global security and resilience. Women's knowledge and leadership strengthens decision-making, driving better, more sustainable, and fairer policies that benefit whole communities.

Together, over many years, we have made real, hard-won progress on this agenda. There are more girls in school; fewer girls forced into early marriage; more women serving in high political offices and private sector leadership positions; and there have been encouraging legal reforms in many countries to address inequalities.

However, progress has stalled. At the current rate, it will take 135 years to close the gender gap worldwide. Women and girls are, and continue to be, disproportionately impacted by crises, be it the COVID pandemic, conflict, or climate change.

Take COVID as an example. At a global level, we have witnessed women shouldering the unpaid care burden and being hardest hit economically, deepening poverty for women and girls. There has been a global surge in gender-based violence, reduced access to sexual and reproductive health and rights; and increases in child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. An estimated 20 million girls will never return to school because of COVID.

Recent months have also shown the deep resilience of the human spirit and of free societies, with women and girls on the frontline of and being affected by multiple brutal conflicts, including most recently due to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Increasing authoritarianism is undermining democratic values, human rights and effective institutions and placing these hard-won gains under threat. Systematic attempts by several actors to roll back and reverse women's and girls' rights have gained momentum at the international and community level.

In Afghanistan, twenty years of progress on women's rights have been reversed. Afghan girls have been largely banned from secondary school for over a year, the only country in the world where this is the case. In Iran, the death of Mahsa Amini is a shocking reminder of the repression faced by women. No one should face violence because of what they wear, how they practice their beliefs or any expression of fundamental rights.

The UK stands steadfast in its commitment to protect and promote women's and girls' rights. In particular, we must respect the bodily autonomy of women and girls throughout their lives by supporting them in exercising their sexual and reproductive rights, preventing all forms of gender-based violence and eliminating harmful practices including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage.

The UK has a long record of leading the charge against gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence. This November, the UK will host a major international conference to promote prevention, justice and support for survivors, and strengthening the global response.

Mr Chair,

We are prepared to do things differently, to think differently, and to work differently to achieve true gender equality. We must act across multiple sectors and disciplines simultaneously and tackle the many forms of disadvantage that women and girls face, spanning age, race, disability, economic status, gender identity, religion/belief and geographical location.

And we cannot do this alone. We will continue to work with our partners, including women's rights organisations who are at the frontlines of this work, to deliver for women and girls everywhere.

I thank you.