

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: next steps, HC 605

Tuesday 3 November 2020

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Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Brendan Clarke-Smith; Mrs Pauline Latham; Navendu Mishra; Mr Virendra Sharma.

Questions 212 - 244

Witnesses

I: Dr Tamsyn Barton, Chief Commissioner, Independent Commission for Aid Impact; Dr Miranda Brown, Former Chief of Africa Section, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN Whistleblower; Major Charmaine Geldenhuys, Former UN Gender Adviser to the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Dr Jasmine-Kim Westendorf, Senior Lecturer in International Relations, La Trobe University; and

II: Dr Tamsyn Barton, Chief Commissioner, Independent Commission for Aid Impact; Baroness Helic, Conservative Life Peer and Former Special Adviser, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to Foreign Secretary, William Hague; and Dr Paul Kirby, Assistant Professorial Research Fellow, Centre for Women, Peace and Security, London School of Economics and Political Science;

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Tamsyn Barton, Dr Miranda Brown, Major Charmaine Geldenhuys and Dr Jasmine-Kim Westendorf.

Chair: I would like to start the next session of the International development Committee's inquiry into sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector. This is a session with two witness panels, and we are looking at the work that is being done by ICAI, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, into both sexual abuse and exploitation by international peacekeepers and their recent report into the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. This will then be fed into the overarching sexual abuse inquiry that we are doing.

I am very grateful to witnesses for making the time and, as ever, very grateful to Committee members for being here today. I will start by handing the questions over to Navendu Mishra, please.

Q212 **Navendu Mishra:** Thank you to all the panellists. My first question is regarding United Nations reforms over the years, and is to Dr Westendorf. What effective progress has been made by the United Nations and troop-contributing countries over the past two decades in tackling sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, and is it any less likely to happen now than perhaps in the past?

Chair: Can I interject? I have been very sloppy and very poor; I have not asked the panel members to introduce themselves. Navendu, I do apologise for cutting across you, but would it be possible for the panel members to introduce themselves when they answer each of their questions in turn?

Dr Westendorf: My name is Dr Jasmine Westendorf. I am a senior lecturer in international relations at La Trobe University in Australia, and my research over the last six years has focused on the nature, scale and effect of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, aid workers and other interveners involved in peace and humanitarian operations globally.

In response to your question, there has been a huge amount of work that has been done at the UN level over the last 20 or so years, beginning really in the mid-to-late 1990s with the adoption of a number of codes of conduct such as *Ten Rules: Code of Personal Conduct for Blue Helmets* and the *We Are United Nations Peacekeepers* manifesto. Each time policies have been developed, they have generally done so in response to large international scandals around sexual abuse, and policies have tended to respond to the particular narratives or issues raised by those scandals.

In the 1990s, scandals in Cambodia and Bosnia led to the adoption of those policies. In the early 2000s, there was greater awareness of the implication of civilian peacekeepers in sexual exploitation and abuse. Policies became much broader. In 2003, the Secretary-General adopted the zero-tolerance bulletin, which prohibited a number of behaviours that



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were classified under the heading, "sexual exploitation and abuse". That has been followed by further work in the United Nations, primarily administrative work, around investigations, around strategies for assistance to victims, around the establishment of the UN Conduct and Discipline Unit and conduct and discipline teams within missions.

The other thing that is probably most important to mention is that in 2015 the Security Council adopted Resolution 2272, which gives the Secretary-General of the United Nations the authority to repatriate units or contingents where members of those units or contingents have credible allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse made against them and where contributing countries are not judged to be doing enough to take those allegations seriously and investigate and hold perpetrators accountable.

In terms of how effective these policies have been, whether they made a difference and whether these abuses are less likely to occur now than 20 years ago, the great challenge for us is that the data available on allegations and the scale of these offences is very poor. It is very difficult to track the perpetration of these offences over time as a result of the challenges in data collection, which I should say are not unique to the United Nations system but apply to all instances of sexual violence and sexual crimes globally. What we know is that there is an under-reporting of these crimes and it is very difficult for allegations to be brought to a conclusion through investigations. Certainly in the UN's case, there are a large number of allegations that do not make it further through the investigations process because of the practical difficulties in doing so.

It is hard to tell whether it is less likely to happen now than 20 years ago. My understanding is that it is not, but that is not because there has been a poor development of policy but rather because the policy has focused on administrative and HR processes. That has gone some way to creating a robust policy framework, but there is much work to be done to address the context and the broader factors that give rise to sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations.

There are a couple of key issues I would flag. One is that the system as it stands does not provide investigators or personnel with the conceptual tools to make sense of power and agency in relation to certain types of sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly in relation to those behaviours that fall under sexual exploitation rather than sexual abuse, so there is a lot of work to be done to ensure that those responsible for investigations have the resources, the conceptual tools and the frameworks to do so.

There are a couple of other challenges around the diversity of behaviours. Some of the work I have done has tried to disentangle what we mean when we say "sexual exploitation and abuse". We are talking about an incredibly diverse set of behaviours, some of which are criminal and some of which are not. They involve varying levels of consent, agency, violence and profit-making motivations. All of those have to be dealt with, and one



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of the challenges of having one unified policy structure is that we do not actually address the many divergent causes of these abuses. That is a great challenge.

There is also a significant lack of commitment within the system to take allegations forward, based on the research I have done. I would say that exists largely at the middle levels rather than at the highest levels of the United Nations. It exists at senior and middle levels within missions, where personnel are either not resourcing these areas of work properly or are, within a cultural context, sending the message that this is not so important and that time should not really be spent on investigating and holding perpetrators accountable.

That lack of commitment and the problems with the way the system is set up to respond to these policies means that there is a sense of impunity that continues to exist within United Nations peacekeeping spaces, which means that perpetrators in large part, I believe, know they can get away with these behaviours because there is not a robust enough system to address the whole range of factors that would contribute to holding them accountable.

Q213 Navendu Mishra: There was a lot to think about there. Moving on to my next question, which is aimed towards Dr Brown, this is regarding the policies and resolutions implemented by the United Nations. Do they translate into real change and implementation in the field? Dr Westendorf mentioned Resolution 2272 and the lack of clear data. There are lots of issues around middle management and the handling of these cases. Dr Brown, do the policies and resolutions implemented by the UN actually translate into real change and implementation at the field level?

Dr Brown: My name is Miranda Brown. I am a former UN staffer. I worked at the United Nations Human Rights Office as the chief of the east and southern Africa section. In 2015, together with my colleague, Anders Kompass, I blew the whistle on child sexual abuse by foreign troops in the Central African Republic, the result of which was an inquiry that came out with a very strong report and confirmed a gross institutional failure.

In answer to your question, there are lots of policies and procedures that have been put in place and there are resolutions that have been adopted, but there is a fundamental problem. Those policies and procedures are important—every organisation, be it the United Nations or an aid organisation, needs to have internal policies and procedures for addressing sexual exploitation and abuse—but the thing is that there is no regulatory body at the moment. We are lacking a regulatory body. Think of the Charity Commission in the UK, which has oversight over charities. We do not have such a regulatory body when it comes to the UN, and we cannot rely on these internal processes and procedures to address this issue.

My view is that we need an independent mechanism. It should be deployed alongside, preferably before, any peacekeeping or aid



operation. If there is no appetite amongst the UN Security Council members, there is nothing stopping the British Government, together with other Governments, establishing a mechanism on the basis that British taxpayers are funding these operations.

We need to continue to impress on the UN leadership the need to implement the policies and procedures they have established, but, frankly, history has shown that they are insufficient and we really need an independent mechanism.

Q214 Navendu Mishra: That was a really important point about an independent process and having an independent body. My final question is to Dr Barton regarding the UK Government's role as a diplomatic power in driving reform in the United Nations and institutions over the review period. Does the UK have a part to play? What sort of role should it play?

Dr Barton: I am the chief commissioner for the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, Tamsyn Barton. Thank you for the question. ICAI's work very much focuses on the evidence about what the UK Government have done. In this case, we certainly have to recognise that they have played a leading role, as they have more broadly in the prevention of sexual violence. The two are very much linked. We produced this report as a companion report; they were only separate because these are treated separately both in the UK and in the UN, but there is a bit of overlap.

What we have in the UK is a considerable diplomatic and military capability, so the fact it has taken a leading role has been very important. There have been the diplomatic demands, which have got a lot of attention at the highest levels. For example, the Prime Minister in 2017 was in the Circle of Leadership, so that naturally ensured there was high-level attention given, and there has been ministerial involvement. On the diplomatic side, that has been very important.

The military side is also important. The only way you can reach troops is effectively through other troops or at least through military personnel, assisted of course by civilians used to working with the military. To give an example, the British Peace Support Team, based in Nairobi, has trained 10,000 peacekeepers. That reaches a certain scale. Its focus, of course, is much wider, but it integrates this and considers it an important part of the training. Every soldier is issued with pocket cards that say, "No excuse", and make it clear what standards are expected of them. From a conduct and discipline perspective, there is a military contribution. Those contributions are definitely important. There has not been an enormous sum of money specifically in relation to this. There has been about £3.8 million of support, mainly directly to staff at the UN, but without that support there really would not have been the capacity in the UN to do what has been described by the other witnesses.

To give you quick examples of practical things that have happened, the training of the office that is responsible for oversight has been important in relation to something called the international protocol, which sets



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standards in how evidence is gathered. The Clear Check system has been set up. That is very interesting, given your interest in wider safeguarding issues. In the context of wider NGO investment, it has been a big issue to ensure that personnel do not get re-employed if they have a track record. The UK's support was very instrumental in setting up a system to make sure UN personnel would not be employed if there is any suggestion that they have a background that would make them unsuitable. Those are practical things that have been done with relatively little money, using diplomatic and military assets.

Navendu Mishra: The footprint the UK has, when it comes to UN peacekeeping missions, whether it is providing troops or training other troops, is obviously significant, so what you have said is very important. I would like to thank all the panellists.

Q215 **Mrs Latham:** My first three questions are pointed towards Jasmine and Miranda. Can you tell us why sexual exploitation and abuse is so endemic in UN peacekeeping missions? What factors and conditions facilitate them?

Dr Westendorf: That is a really tricky question. One of the things I have tried to do in my research in recent years is disentangle the types of behaviours and the way different factors give rise to different types of behaviours. Just briefly, I would say that under the broad heading of "sexual exploitation and abuse" there are four general types of behaviours.

There is what I would call opportunistic sexual abuse, such as rape, for instance. There is transactional sex, which is very broad and is probably the most prevalent type of behaviour that allegations are made in relation to. There is what I would call networked sexual exploitation and abuse, so when peacekeepers and others are involved in prostitution networks and human trafficking for sex and other purposes. There often tends to be a profit motive there. Lastly, there are the very sadistic and planned instances of abuse such as those that were at the heart of the scandal in the Central African Republic.

If you look at what causes sexual exploitation and abuse, there are a broad range of factors that interact in different ways to produce those different types of behaviours. On the one hand, you have the context of vulnerability into which peacekeeping operations are deployed, the presence of large displaced civilian populations, the establishment and consolidation of peacekeeping economies, which are based on poverty, deprivation and enormous material inequality between peacekeepers and those in the community they have been sent to protect and serve, and also the presence of criminal networks, for instance. Those contextual factors are important in establishing the context and vulnerability in which sexual exploitation and abuse are perpetrated.

There are also the military contexts and rules that play an important role. For instance, this includes standing orders for militaries regarding



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fraternisation, alcohol consumption, curfews, access to recreational activities and facilities, deployment times, rest and recreation and so on. On their own, there is probably too much emphasis put on those as a factor that gives rise to sexual exploitation and abuse. They do contribute, but it is overstated.

Some of the factors that are probably more important relate to the normative and systematic factors. This might be cultural pockets within certain parts of the missions where individuals are assured of their impunity for certain behaviours or where there are groups who are participating in sexual exploitation and abuse together so they know they will look out for one another and essentially create patterns that are reinforced by one another.

The issues of military cultures and military masculinity certainly play a role. There are also issues around the social and political power structures, particularly as they relate to the relationship between local personnel and peacekeepers, which include the extreme power differential, access to decision-making capacities and access to recourse and so on. Underlying all of that are issues of racism and sexism.

If I could give an example of how this plays out in different ways, if we take the example of rape, I would say that is facilitated by the intersection of the very unregulated situations into which peacekeepers are deployed in combination with military cultures, particularly patterns or behaviours of masculinity and gendered norms of sexual behaviour. Those are quite different from the factors that give rise to transactional sex. Those transactional sex economies tend to develop in economies of extreme deprivation, poverty, the material inequality between interveners and locals where survival sex is seen by civilians as a way to secure their basic needs and where there is a very murky issue of consent and agency that creates situations where certain peacekeepers may say, "I was not driving this behaviour. Women were enthusiastically seeking my attention".

If you look at the context, the behaviours of local women or children are driven by the contexts in which they live, and the fact that peacekeepers may be offering, even if it is informally, access or protection and support and so on, which leads to situations where people may be exchanging sex for very small amounts of food or money. That creates patterns and cycles of further vulnerability and exploitation either by the same personnel or others.

In terms of the factors that give rise to sexual exploitation and abuse, they are many, they are varied and they operate differently in different contexts. That is critical to getting the policy settings right for an effective response, because, as it currently stands, there is essentially a one-size-fits-all approach to understanding the causal and contextual factors, and that does not get to the heart of the issue in each particular context and



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it does not particularly deal with each of the different types of abuse I have described.

Dr Brown: I agree with what Jasmine has said. In terms of my own experience of working in peacekeeping missions, as Jasmine described, primarily there is a power differential or a power dynamic that is established there. We also have to bear in mind the context in which these peacekeepers are working. Quite often there are gross human rights violations taking place alongside this. In my own experience of working with peacekeepers, you will often find that they are confronted with human rights violations. In a way, this is dehumanising; therefore, their approach to sexual exploitation and abuse is not seen as a huge violation of human rights. Of course it is, but it is not perceived as such. There are a variety of factors.

What is really important, though, is that we have these human rights components within peacekeeping missions. That is something I wanted to raise. We do have various mechanisms that could provide us with further information. My own experience of working with the human rights components is that they are there to monitor the human rights situation in the country but they are also empowered to monitor the violations committed by peacekeepers. The problem we have is that they are double-hatted. They report to the head of the mission and the country as well as to the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

When you look at the reports that are produced, you get an appreciation of the environment more generally where these human rights violations, including sexual exploitation and abuse, occur. There are a variety of contexts. There are clearly contexts in which the risks go up, but more generally we need to have a better handle from inside the peacekeeping mission. One concrete recommendation would be to make these human rights components independent from reporting to the head of the mission and have them report directly to the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They are trained and professional human rights officers. We may get a better understanding of what is going on there.

Q216 **Mrs Latham:** To both of you, again, from the evidence available and your experience from working in the field, what works as an actual deterrent to the perpetrators? What kind of accountability mechanisms could there be?

Dr Westendorf: The greatest deterrent is surety of punishment, essentially. At the moment, the greatest challenge is that impunity is assumed by many within these missions who choose to perpetrate abuse and exploitation. Impunity is created by a couple of key factors. One is the challenge to reporting that is faced by either victims or others within missions who know of colleagues who are perpetrating abuse.

To go back to what I said earlier about transactional sex being one of the greatest challenges here, there is a huge amount of training about what the rules are, and there is an enormous lack of understanding in terms of



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how to make sense of transactional sex as a prohibited behaviour. I have interviewed so many people who say to me, "Sexual abuse we can handle. We know what that looks like. We understand how to investigate it. When we see our colleagues doing it, we can identify it". When it comes to transactional sex, they say, "What do you want me to do: go into their bedroom and see what is going on?" or, "It is a little bit too hard. If there is some exchange or some consent, how can we tell if it is exploitation?"

To me, that is at the heart of this issue of impunity because it discourages people from reporting when they have a sense that there is something not right going on. After their deployments, many people have said to me, "I wish I had reported on that, but at the time I was not sure whether I would be seen as a troublemaker or as making unfounded allegations about a well-respected colleague without enough evidence to back it up". That is the starting point for the impunity, when people do not feel supported to raise issues and have them be investigated independently and fairly.

The other issue is that there is still punishment for whistleblowers in a social and organisational sense, which has to be addressed, and there is certainly a lot of challenge for local people to make reports. Countless people have said to me, "My friend, my sister, this other person I know made a report. We never heard what happened, so why would I go through the trauma? Why would I tell people that this had happened to me or my children, if I do not think it is going to go anywhere?" There needs to be greater trust in both personnel working in the system and among local communities that allegations will be taken seriously. That would be a great first step in addressing that sense of impunity for perpetrators.

There are then the things we are all much more aware of, in terms of how to ensure allegations are taken forward in a proper way and investigated and resourced properly, in order to bring investigations to a fulsome conclusion as well.

Dr Brown: I agree with Jasmine. The lack of punishment is clearly not helping the situation. It is a serious problem. There is no accountability for these abuses. A public excoriation and a public outcry about abuses does act, to some extent, as a deterrent. We see these periodic reports typically in the media or when whistleblowers come forward. From what I hear, amongst the peacekeepers that does send a bit of a shockwave through the system, so we need both. We need to focus on dealing with this impunity and ensuring there is punishment, and we also need to allow people to come forward and report this abuse.

Frankly, the UN whistleblower protection system is an abject failure. This is not just my own experience but that of others. Anders Kompass has spoken out about this recently, but there are other colleagues in the system who continue to face abuses, including in the UN's Human Rights



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Office. I have raised this concern with the Secretary-General directly, and it will be important for the UK Government to act. It is a concrete action the Government can take to do something to fix the UN whistleblower protection system, starting in the UN's Human Rights Office.

Q217 Mrs Latham: You have slightly touched on the next part of this. What evidence is there on the impact that delivering training on sexual exploitation and abuse to civilian as well as military peacekeepers has on their behaviour? Do you want to add any more to what you have said? You both touched on this slightly.

Dr Westendorf: One of the problems with the approaches to preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping to date has been an overemphasis on training; it represents a very individualised approach to understanding sexual exploitation and abuse. It is based on the idea that individuals perpetrate abuses, and they do so because they do not know those behaviours are prohibited and they do not know they will be held accountable if they do perpetrate them.

The assumption that perpetrators do not know that those behaviours are prohibited is flawed. There is an enormous amount of work that has been done over decades now in relation to training. Training in terms of ensuring that personnel know what behaviours are prohibited is alright. One of the gaps in training has been about providing personnel and leadership with the capacity to navigate those complex intersections of power, agency, exploitation and abuse that I have already spoken about.

What is really needed to make the training more effective is political education that goes along with the training. This is not just training on what behaviours are prohibited but why those behaviours are prohibited, which would help address the misgivings that many personnel have about the rules around sexual exploitation. I have had personnel from all levels of peace operations say to me things along the lines of, "The sexual abuse stuff we get, but with sexual exploitation how can they prohibit those behaviours? It makes no sense". Some of these are perfectly legal in certain countries, including countries that we come from. It casts doubt on the whole work around sexual exploitation broadly.

If training actually addressed why those behaviours are prohibited, how those behaviours contribute to undermining mission effectiveness and mission goals, which is something my research has documented very clearly, it could have a much greater effect in ensuring those personnel take those rules seriously and obey them.

The other critical thing there is for personnel to understand why their everyday behaviours affect their relationships with local communities and the overall success of peace operations. That is what is missing in training at the moment. The training has done good work in terms of socialising the rules but not necessarily explaining them and embedding the culture of preventing sexual exploitation and abuse.



Dr Brown: I agree. The training has made progress. The training is really important. I am sure it can be improved, like any training, and it should be contextualised more and made more localised to the conditions that are actually taking place in the mission. It may be perceived as quite abstract in some contexts. Having said that, one could do a survey; one could look at further surveys on the training to get feedback from the individuals who have been trained to find out how they perceive it. I know some work has gone on on that.

Training is important and we need to continue it, but, frankly, I agree with Jasmine: the lack of awareness is not the issue here. There is impunity; there are conditions that allow these abuses to take place, and that is what we need to focus on. I am slightly concerned that there is still a focus on training and awareness-raising as opposed to tackling the actual perpetrators.

Q218 **Mrs Latham:** Tamsyn, what evidence is there that the MoD's work to train peacekeeping troops on gender issues and sexual exploitation and abuse is having any impact on prevention?

Dr Barton: I agree with a lot of what has been said by the witnesses about the limitations of training. The MoD has seriously tried to address some of those issues. One of the things that impressed us in our field visits was seeing the role of gender advisers, which was being increased, in ensuring the training addressed gender issues, issues of power and so on.

What was very clear was they were using the argument that seemed to be the most persuasive in the context: that ultimately missions would be more successful. It was part of the overall mission goals for human security and overall success. To that extent, they had taken this on board. They were not really treating it as an individualised issue but more a collective troop-conduct and discipline issue, so that was an improvement.

The other thing we were pleased to see, because it clearly resulted directly from an earlier ICAI review of the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, which was funding the MoD efforts in this area, was that they were finally introducing monitoring and evaluation into their programmes. That is something that has been long been advocated and had not happened. The teams we talked to were very enthusiastic about their new all-singing, all-dancing impact evaluation system.

Having said that, it was at a very early stage. It was clear that they had gone a lot further in working out at how they would look at the impacts of training immediately and the extent to which the ideas and the knowledge had been taken on board, and they were obviously finding it quite challenging to know whether, in theatre, soldiers or civilians associated with the military were behaving differently. That is inherently challenging, but to us it felt like there was a risk that part could drop by the wayside.



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It was also notable that they were not really keeping an eye out for the levels of allegations and reporting. Of course you would not expect training to have a direct and immediate impact on reducing incidence—normally, awareness raising would increase them—but nevertheless it would be important for them to have a sense of whether it has actually continued to occur or not. That is likely to make the training more effective, so more learning would be good. In our follow-up review, we hope to see the extent to which these efforts to monitor impacts have really borne fruit or not.

Chair: Witnesses, we have only just finished question 2. We have another five to go and half an hour or 25 minutes to ask them in. Could I ask you to be quite direct in your replies? I would be very grateful for that.

Q219 **Mr Sharma:** Major, as a former UN gender adviser to the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC, what did your role consist of exactly and what were your key areas of focus?

Charmaine Geldenhuys: I am Major Charmaine Geldenhuys, former gender adviser to MONUSCO in the DRC. My role was to report direct to the force commander as his gender adviser. That was to ensure we looked at gender mainstreaming throughout the mission. My training and activity included child protection, protection of civilians, human rights abuses and violations as well as sexual exploitation and abuse.

Q220 **Mr Sharma:** What component of your work was specifically focused on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and what sort of work did this consist in?

Charmaine Geldenhuys: I worked directly with the head of the conduct and discipline team, who has ultimate responsibility for responding to and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. We worked together to come up with a strategy for the force within the mission, and that was really important. We took a holistic approach, which included how we could institutionalise that within the force with policies, procedures and leadership buy-in, what kind of training we needed to deliver, what kind of enforcement activities we needed to have and what kind of communication strategy we needed to have in place.

It needed to be something that was regular and ongoing. As the previous witnesses have said, it is not about one-off training; it is about having an overarching strategy and understanding where risk areas are and what we need to do to address them through the whole life of the mission and the soldiers' deployments there.

Q221 **Mr Sharma:** What resources and support did you have access to in your role? Did you feel those resources were sufficient to integrate a gender perspective into the peacekeeping missions?

Charmaine Geldenhuys: A gender adviser is a solo role, so I did not have a team of people or resources dedicated to myself. However,



because I worked directly to the three-star general, I pretty much had any resources I required. By having a strategy, I could take to the general a particular issue I wanted to address, and then he would give me authority to use his manpower as required. Though I had no resources, I could access what I required through the head of the force.

Q222 Mr Sharma: I would go for “person-power” rather than “manpower”. What concrete impact have you observed in peacekeeping personnel as a result of your work specifically regarding sexual exploitation? Is this impact systematically measured by the MoD and/or the UN?

Charmaine Geldenhuys: I have not worked with the MoD on this project, only with the UN. In our work with the UN, we had markers and indicators, and we were required to report on those markers and indicators every three months. That meant we could set out what it was we wanted to achieve and then actually assess ourselves against those markers. We created a framework that would allow it to be measurable.

The impact I observed was that, similar to what some of the previous witnesses said, when I couched what we needed to do in terms of operational effectiveness rather than academic concepts, I found that the commanders much more quickly bought into what I was talking about, because they could see how it would impact on security. Once I had the leadership buy-in, I was much more easily able to reach down into their various brigades. That was where the real impact was: setting it out in a way that made it accessible to military commanders rather than being an abstract concept.

Q223 Mr Sharma: Now that you have left this role, what changes are needed to increase the impact of UN gender advisers on behaviours and norms in peacekeeping missions?

Charmaine Geldenhuys: You cannot change norms and cultures with a few training sessions. It has to be a through-system approach. You need policies and you need leadership buy-in. Leadership is incredibly important with forces, because, really, what our commanders tell us to believe, think and do tends to be what we believe, think and do. That leadership buy-in is incredibly important.

We then need to take a much longer and through-mission approach, so that we are looking at how we engage with our troops, how we are reminding them, where we are observing them, what enforcement we are putting into place and ensuring that takes place periodically and in different ways throughout the mission. Otherwise, we risk having an amount of training at the beginning of the mission that frankly, six months, nine months or a year later, is quite far back in people’s memories. It needs to have a strategic approach, with a whole strategy addressing all of these different elements that can help keep our troops on a straight path the whole way through the mission.

Q224 Chair: Thank you for giving such lovely crisp answers. I listened with



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intent to what you were saying. Did you witness or were you made aware of sexual exploitation when you were based out in the DRC? Are you comfortable that the interventions you made actually made a difference?

Charmaine Geldenhuys: Because of the role I had as a gender adviser, it was not my role to respond directly to these allegations. That was the conduct and discipline team. However, because I worked very closely with them, I can say that it was taken very seriously by the mission itself and the force itself. At senior levels in the force, there was a zero-tolerance approach, and that was clear. That meant, when we dropped down a level to the troop contingent commanders, they took it very seriously as well, because the force commander took it seriously.

On the occasions where we did come across predominantly people reporting fellow soldiers who they believed had committed these violations, it was very quick. The conduct and discipline team would send investigators in, and it was very common that the countries themselves would send an investigation team to get to the bottom of it. Predominantly, it would be pre-emptive, and the soldier would be removed from their post and would be very likely to have been extracted from the country while the investigation was continuing. In my mission, from a force perspective and a headquarters perspective, it was taken incredibly seriously.

Q225 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Good afternoon, everybody. I would like to ask Dr Westendorf and Dr Brown how effective conduct and discipline teams and the Office of Internal Oversight Services are at training staff and investigating any allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Dr Brown: The number-one problem with OIOS, as it is called in this context, is that there is a lack of independence from the system. We need to take a wider picture here of whether the survivor and victim would want to engage in an investigation or engage with an investigation that is perceived as internal. OIOS's mandate is still within the UN construct. One cannot really get away from that structural lack of independence.

In terms of your question, when it comes to an individual investigation, OIOS has clearly conducted many; it has recruited more female investigators; it has looked to establish protocols and guidance for investigating sexual exploitation and abuse. It has done all of these internal aspects, but it still suffers from a fundamental lack of independence.

What we have seen in many of these scandals or what typically happens when there is a big scandal is that there is an independent panel that gets established, as we saw with the Central African Republic. We end up with the Conduct and Discipline Unit and OIOS on some occasions, and then on other occasions we have an independent panel because the scandal has become so large. There needs to be a fundamental rethink of which model is best. I feel strongly that it should be an independent mechanism.



Dr Westendorf: I agree with what Dr Brown has just said. I would say in addition that there are two sets of issues in terms of the effectiveness of the OIOS and CDU. Some of them are practical challenges. Over the last years, a lot of those practical challenges relating to resourcing, training and types of investigators have been addressed. It is the systematic issues that remain the greatest challenges.

In my research I have been surprised by how uncommitted certain OIOS staff have been to the zero-tolerance bulletin and to the rules around which behaviours are prohibited. That goes back to my earlier point around political will and commitment to the enforcement of rules on sexual exploitation and abuse.

The other issue is around member states. There are certain contributing countries that have made it relatively clear that they do not have a strong interest in holding personnel accountable, and there is a process of mutual reinforcement when some pockets of the OIOS are also not particularly interested in robust accountability mechanisms. They feed off one another to create that impunity and undermine the system. Addressing that systemic issue by establishing a more independent mechanism would be a really positive move forward.

Q226 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Does the UN make involvement from troop-contributing countries in peacekeeping missions in any way conditional on their record on safeguarding and holding perpetrators to account? Following on from that, are troop-contributing countries doing enough to hold perpetrators accountable?

Dr Brown: There is not a conditional aspect to the relationship, in answer to your first question.

The troop-contributing countries' responses to sexual exploitation and abuse are very varied, patchy and insufficient. Our Government could make more of a bilateral diplomatic outreach to these countries, to the TCCs, as they are known. We know there are many cases where there has just not been any follow-up action, and those cases need to be pursued. In answer to your question, there must be further engagement with the TCCs. There is a patchy response and it is insufficient.

Dr Westendorf: I would have a very slightly different perspective. Technically, under Security Council Resolution 2272, the Secretary-General is encouraged and authorised to look at the track record of troop-contributing countries and to disallow their participation if they have a record of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The mechanism is there to make participation or contribution to a peacekeeping operation contingent on past behaviours and on a commitment to preventing and holding accountable. However, in practice this speaks to the major challenge in this area, which is that the UN Secretariat does not have control over troop-contributing countries, and there are many reasons that drive troop-contributing countries to



contribute personnel to peacekeeping operations, not all of which align with the motivations underpinning those peacekeeping operations themselves. There are financial, prestige and other motivations in terms of access to new training, weaponry and so on, which might motivate countries to contribute personnel.

There is also the issue that some troop-contributing countries use sexual violence strategically in their own war fighting that they do outside of peacekeeping operations, and they do not intend to hold their personnel accountable to the UN's SEA policies when they are deployed into peacekeeping operations.

To the issue of whether TCCs are doing enough, some TCCs have no interest in doing enough or doing more. The UN as a system is severely limited in its capacity to hold those TCCs accountable or even to say, "We will not accept your contributions", because the reality is that UN peacekeeping is critically underfunded. There are not enough troop contributions from member states, and the Secretary-General and the Secretariat are essentially held hostage to the particular TCCs that contribute large numbers of personnel. If they say, "No thanks", to those particular TCCs, or if they repatriate them, they will not have enough personnel to hold those peacekeeping operations together.

This is not just an issue of the UN doing enough to demand that TCCs hold perpetrators accountable. There is a systematic issue, and there is room for countries like, for instance, the UK, Australia and others, which have the resources, to ensure peacekeeping is properly resourced with personnel so the Secretariat is not held hostage, essentially, and can enact its ability to repatriate and to refuse contributions in certain cases.

Dr Brown: I agree. The UN's Human Rights Office is frequently called upon to do human rights due diligence and other assessments of various troops and Governments that might be engaging in peacekeeping operations.

Frequently, the political paradigm is one, as has just been explained, in which these concerns are given minor importance overall in terms of deciding whether or not there can be any troops deployed to a particular country. Again, it is underfunded, under-resourced and human rights violations, including sexual exploitation and abuse, play a minor role, in my observation, in terms of the selection of the troops.

Q227 **Mrs Latham:** My questions are again to Miranda and Jasmine. What impact have the UN Special Coordinator and the UN Victims' Rights Advocate had on sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers in the field?

Dr Brown: The Victims' Rights Advocate has had a substantial effect. There has been a statement on victims' rights issued that is being used across the international community, or certainly by NGOs as well, in



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terms of what support services should be provided to victims. It is an important function.

The Special Coordinator is also a very important function. It is the highest-level, most visible function across the UN system. I am currently quite concerned about the situation with the Special Coordinator, primarily because the current incumbent Jane Holl Lute also performs other functions. There must be a dedicated person placed in that position. They must be full time and motivated to address this issue and not undertake other work. That would be a concern that I would like to raise with this Committee.

These two functions are really important. They need to remain and they need to be properly funded. As I said earlier, they are not independent from the UN; they cannot perform more than a very limited function. I go back to an international NGO. We have those functions primarily in an international NGO when we have a safeguarding director and we might have a co-ordinator, if it is an NGO that has different operations, that co-ordinates. That does not remove the other role of the independent monitoring mechanism or regulatory body. That is what is missing.

We get caught in this paradigm of saying that those two positions do not perform adequately. They are performing their function, but their function is limited.

Dr Westendorf: I agree wholeheartedly. These are critically important positions. The work that is being done by the Special Coordinator internally in the UN system to try to improve processes to keep this issue on the right agenda has been really important and very valuable.

The role of Victims' Rights Advocate has probably been even more important in shifting towards a victim-centred or survivor-centred approach and ensuring that staff within the UN system recognise that the survivor should be at the centre of any of these responses and that those voices should be heard at all levels through the processes of addressing sexual exploitation and abuse.

They need greater resourcing. I am surprised that there is one Special Coordinator. The Office of the Special Coordinator has very limited staff. The Victims' Rights Advocate has equally limited staff. I would say they could do an enormous amount to shift some of the cultural and organisational issues I have spoken about if they were better resourced, because that would signal to their colleagues within the organisation that this is being taken seriously, that they ought to be listened to and that they ought to be collaborated with on these responses.

Q228 Mrs Latham: Could you both briefly comment on what more should be done by the United Nations, and indeed countries like the UK, to improve support and reparation for victims?



Dr Brown: I might go first. We need an independent mechanism deployed alongside these peacekeeping operations. We have known for a very long period that survivors and victims are very wary, rightly in my view, in many ways, of coming forward and talking to the organisations that employ the perpetrators. Whether it is an aid organisation or the UN, they are not going to come forward and neither are whistleblowers or other witnesses. We need this independent mechanism. It could be established by the UN or by Governments. If there is no appetite, my view is that the British Government could get together with some other Governments and do it.

As an example, we have election monitors who are deployed to elections. We can have aid or peacekeeping monitors; we can have a body that is established to go alongside it and is there specifically to address these concerns.

Dr Westendorf: I agree. I would add that it would be important for member states and troop-contributing countries such as the UK to be honest and vocal about any allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. At the moment, the default position is that these are embarrassing and they are things we should be ashamed of. They absolutely are both embarrassing and things we should be ashamed of when they occur, but they do occur and, as the Victims' Rights Advocate has said, if we are not getting allegations, there is something wrong with our processes.

Culturally, it is really important that countries such as the UK, Canada, Australia and so on say, "We have received these allegations, and this is what we are doing to help shift the culture among TCCs more broadly". We can be honest about it. This does not have to mean that a particular member state is being shamed; it could be well regarded that we are honest. That would then really improve the capacity of the other mechanisms already in the system to have full effect, because there is that disconnect at the moment where troop-contributing countries are loth to take responsibility for these issues. There is a tendency to brush them under the carpet.

There is a very keen sense of shame, particularly among southern troop-contributing countries, that they are being blamed for these things when there is a clear imbalance in which countries are shouldering the burden of peacekeeping. Even if some countries like the UK are not sending as many troops, if they could be part of that discussion about normalising the responses, it could be really critical to helping rebalance the discussion.

Dr Brown: I have one point. We hear a lot about how there is a problem if we do not hear about abuses. That is a refrain I hear constantly, and it concerns me a little bit, because we run the risk of normalising sexual exploitation and abuse as part of aid or peacekeeping operations. I am increasingly concerned that it is being seen as a programmatic failure such as fraud or corruption. We constantly need to tell ourselves, "No,



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none of these abuses are acceptable". There should not be any abuses. Obviously, we want to encourage reporting, but, on the other hand, we cannot be seen to condone it.

Q229 Mrs Latham: Tamsyn, are the UK Government doing enough to support the programmes designed and targeted at meeting the needs of victims and survivors in the peacekeeping context?

Dr Barton: The short answer is that, no, they are not doing enough. We should give some credit, and we have given some credit in our review. For example, the Victims' Rights Advocate, whose good work was just mentioned, is funded by the UK. It was the UK that pressed the UN to do the only grassroots projects aimed at working with survivors, precisely to have community-based hotlines set up to give people the confidence to report. They monitored it to the extent that they could see spikes in the reporting as a result of those activities. That was a really important thing on the ground compared to these rather distant and more abstract ways of addressing the issue. They get some credit for that.

Having said that, the UK contributed £300,000 per annum to that project, which is a relatively small amount for the four countries concerned, and certainly a small amount in relation to the total they were contributing. We felt the balance was not really right. We have just heard from all the witnesses about the culture of impunity and the enormous challenges and hurdles to survivors getting any justice. In that context, giving them something towards what they are asking for and working with them so they feel empowered is enormously important, and we felt that was lacking.

The UK was not one of the 21 donors to the victims' assistance fund, which is where there are at least practical measures to support survivors. There were really very few links to the rest of the work on conflict-related sexual violence or sexual violence and gender-based violence more broadly, which would have brought more of a focus to this. There were a lot of opportunities being missed there, and that is why it was one of our recommendations that that should be more of the focus and more integrated with the wider work that was being done.

Q230 Chair: Tamsyn, could I build on that with my final question? From your report, how much of a priority is tackling sexual violence by peacekeepers for the Government? Is the merger going to help or hinder, as they go forward, in trying to address this issue?

Dr Barton: I know that ICAI could be accused in each review of saying, "The Government needs to focus more on the topic we are reviewing", so I try to be very careful to avoid saying that everything has to be a priority; otherwise, it is unhelpful. It is clear that there need to be consistent priorities. If there is going to be an impact, there needs to be a significant resource for it to work. In this work, the UK Government have used their assets well without spending an enormous amount of money. They could probably have done even more if they had used more of the

expertise on the former DFID side in relation to projects, programmes and evidence around gender-based violence more generally.

To give you a sense of the priority, overall in the CSSF there is something like 25 million in the multilateral strand. This has taken 3 million of that. In one sense, that is relatively impressive, if you look at all of the priorities; on the other hand, to have a significant impact, more would be required than there currently is. I have to say that it was impossible for us to disentangle the precise resources devoted to this in relation to both the MoD and DFID, but I doubt it would make an enormous difference.

Apart from the resources, I should say that the witnesses have raised the questions about the priorities for the diplomatic efforts. There are some big questions there. The British Peace Support Team in Nairobi believes that the only real levers relate to the funding of troop-contributing countries, so there is an enormous advocacy task there. Of course it is not complicated to solve, but in terms of diplomatic priorities there could be opportunities with the links that we mentioned were not good enough before. That might change the diplomatic priorities a bit.

Chair: Thank you very much to all of the witnesses for this first panel. It is really appreciated how candid you have been with us.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Tamsyn Barton, Baroness Helic and Dr Paul Kirby.

Q231 **Chair:** I will now turn to our second panel, which relates to ICAI's review on the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, often known as PSVI. Tamsyn Barton, I am very grateful that you are going to be able to stay with us for this panel, but could I ask Dr Paul Kirby and Baroness Helic to introduce themselves and tell us what you are bringing to the table and what your experience is in this field?

Dr Kirby: Good afternoon and thank you very much for having me. I am Paul Kirby. I am a research fellow at the Centre for Women, Peace and Security at the London School of Economics and Political Science. I am also a co-director of the GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub.

My research is really focused on three themes. The first of those is explanations for sexual and gender-based violence in conflict; the second is the broader politics of the women, peace and security agenda; and the third is masculinity in global politics. I studied the emergence and the early stages of PSVI in the 2011-2015 period, and I recently returned to the subject to see how it has been evolving since.

Q232 **Chair:** Baroness Helic, I know you have a long association with this area. Could you tell us a little about it?



Baroness Helic: Thank you very much. It is interesting that Paul and I have a connection here, because the Centre for Women, Peace and Security is a direct outcome of the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. It was launched and set up by William Hague when he was Foreign Secretary and Special Envoy of the High Commissioner for Refugees, Angelina Jolie. Greetings to Paul.

My connection to this issue was that I was William Hague's senior special adviser, and I was one of the voices that persuaded him that this is an issue that is worth the attention of the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom. I succeeded in as far as it comes to launching the initiative and taking it forward.

I come from Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of the countries that suffered enormously in the 1990s, particularly at the hands of military and paramilitary forces who decided that violence against women and the perpetration of war and sexual violence were successful tools not only for ethnic cleansing but also for destroying individuals' communities. They committed these crimes on the basis of ethnic differences, as was seen at the time.

I am currently a member of the International Relations and Defence Committee and a Member of the House of Lords. I also work for a not-for-profit organisation that focuses on violence against women and on PSVI.

Chair: Thank you very much. We are honoured to have you all here.

Q233 **Mrs Latham:** Could you tell us, in your view, what are the root causes of and deterrents to sexual violence in conflict? Does the UK Government's work on sexual violence in conflict reflect an accurate understanding of these issues? Maybe we could start with Baroness Helic.

Baroness Helic: It is a long story, if I may. The coalition Government, which I was a part of, had a full understanding, first, of the enormity of the crime, which has been a part of almost every conflict we are aware of in human history, but also of the possibility of doing something about it.

I would, however, say that the last four Foreign Secretaries over the last six years have lost the focus and the political will to take forward the conclusions of the summit in 2014 and the idea of why the PSVI was created. The basic driving force behind this was the desire to change global attitudes and to agree practical action to tackle impunity for the use of rape as a weapon of war.

Dr Kirby: The first thing to say is that there is a confounding diversity that is contained in this phrase "conflict-related sexual violence". It is worth maybe reflecting on this a little bit for a moment. There really is not one distinct form of sexual violence that exists within conflict that we can separate from that which exists outside of it or in peacetime situations.



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There are several different ways that we could divide that up, but I would point to the relative differences, as far as PSVI is concerned, in a number of different manifestations of sexual violence. The first would be military-perpetrated sexual violence that is ordered or encouraged by a commander. This is what we often mean when we talked about “strategic” or “instrumental” sexual violence, close to this idea of rape as a weapon of war, where the assumed scenario is one of military operations targeting populations in a battle space.

There is also military-perpetrated sexual violence that is endemic to an armed group but that comes from socialisation or internal group dynamics, where the commanders are in a position of tolerating violence—they may even make some ineffective moves to prevent it—but they are not themselves the commissioners of the violence, which is important, because it then becomes intertwined with more apparently individual-level motivations.

There is also paramilitary or gang violence, which is linked to a war context but may be more marked by opportunism, potentially reflecting pre-existing local political vendettas or contexts and not always attributable to a party to the conflict.

Then we can distinguish sexual violence that might happen in a situation of detention, political repression targeted against particular individuals as a form of torture, part of the apparatus of the state, used against its political opponents. This might be one of the contexts where we see higher levels of violence against men and boys than would be the case in other contexts.

There are non-military abuses, which come from authority figures in the community. That might be targeted at sexual or gender minorities or ethnic minorities within a community in the situation of social collapse that happens in wartime.

There is intimate-partner violence; we have good information to suggest that this increases in conflict and post-conflict settings, even though we do not often think about it as generated by the conflict itself. It is linked to all kinds of other risk factors, for example around substance abuse.

Then there are the humanitarian abuses, which we heard about to a certain degree in the last session, where providers of aid, peacekeepers, other international interveners may be the commissioners of violence.

The crucial thing is that effective measures to prevent or respond to sexual violence may look quite different for those different kinds of violence. Something like training on international humanitarian law and gender awareness may have an impact for some but not for others, and that is compounded by a whole set of questions around whether we are talking about a pre-conflict stage, during conflict or a post-conflict setting.



In terms of the UK's response, Baroness Helic is completely correct: there has been a drop-off in political commitment over the last couple of years, but it is also important to say that PSVI, at least in its initial stage, was interested in particular kinds of violence that were happening in conflict. That focus on impunity was more towards the military-command or strategic forms of violence that I begin with, and that has shifted somewhat across the years. The question of the UK's effectiveness in tackling that is intimately bound up with which form of sexual violence and which kind of context we are talking about.

Q234 Mrs Latham: Could I turn that over briefly to Baroness Helic? Obviously, you worked very closely with William Hague, and you mentioned how it has not seemed to be a priority for the last four Foreign Ministers. Do you know why or do you think you know why that might be the case?

Baroness Helic: I will try to answer your question. It is a really good question, because PSVI was considered to be a very successful model. It was embedded in the foreign policy of the coalition Government. I worked very closely with the Foreign Secretary, Lord Hague—William Hague at the time. One interesting thing I observed is that he would use every single bilateral and multilateral engagement to raise this issue, to garner support, to explain how important it is and to see it as a policy that the United Kingdom was able to pursue not because it had to but because it has the capability to as a P5 member and, at the time, an EU member state, as a NATO member state and as a Commonwealth member state, et cetera.

Since then I must say that several things have happened. Lord Hague, when he left the Foreign Office and he was Leader of the House, was appointed as the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. This role was, if I can say so, taken from Cabinet level, as a Secretary of State, to the ministerial level, and in this particular case a Minister in the House of Lords. If you are not at the Cabinet table, you have much less influence than you would otherwise.

Four Foreign Secretaries—I cannot believe I am saying that we have had four—over the last six years did not, first, see that this was a priority. Secondly, there was this odd lesson that was learned from PSVI. Every Foreign Secretary, probably apart from Philip Hammond, wanted their own project; they wanted their own success. It was quite disappointing for me to see that this would be ever considered to be William Hague's initiative; it was supposed to be a United Kingdom initiative. It should not owe its life to a party, a political leader or a particular Foreign Secretary. There has been an impact, first, as I say, from taking it off the table in the Cabinet and then, secondly, because of Foreign Secretaries wanting to put their own mark on their tenure in the Foreign Office.

Q235 Mrs Latham: They wanted vanity projects, really. Again, I have a question for both of you. Given the scale and multiple causes of sexual violence in conflict, what practical steps and difference can countries like the UK actually make in driving that change?



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Baroness Helic: There is nothing stronger than political will and leadership. We have so many tools at our disposal as a country. Until recently, we had a separate Department for International Development, which was well equipped. We have armed forces that are, as they say, second to none and are also attuned to this issue.

In order to make a difference, there is one ingredient that is necessary, and that is to have that political leadership and to have that political will. We need to look around and say, "What tools do I have? How can I make a difference?" From my experience, I have noticed that so many countries would voluntarily want to discuss the issue and say how they can make a contribution. Once you withdraw that and people see that is not on your agenda any more, you lose that leadership. Political will, leadership and a conscious and focused desire to make a difference in this area would make an enormous difference in addressing this crime.

Dr Kirby: I would certainly agree that political will is essential. Political will was clearly the precondition for everything the PSVI did achieve in that early stage. We could itemise the various declarations, the Security Council resolution and the summit itself. There was very-high profile and visible expression of that political will.

What that political will translates to and what happens with some of those declarations and initiatives is a much more vexing question. We can probably all agree that it is good to have initiatives like PSVI and it is great to have that political will there, but how that manifests in this wider ecosystem of activity on sexual violence in conflict is more complicated. We could think about an example such as the focus on international criminal prosecutions and impunity and whether that is the best avenue for the political will to be expressed or whether it is something closer to the broad-based, gender-based-violence work that took place in somewhere like DFID before.

There are a number of different pathways that open up, depending on which kind of violence we are talking about and which mechanisms the political will brings to bear.

Q236 **Mrs Latham:** Tamsyn, given that it is fairly recent that the Foreign Office has swallowed up DFID and become the FCDO, do you see them using any evidence of what works in preventing sexual violence in conflict when designing their programmes either in country offices or at central level?

Dr Barton: We were pleased that in the Government response to our review they said that they were going to be doing this more. It is a good start that they accept it, and of course we will be looking in our follow-up review to see whether they do what they say.

Looking up to 2019, the review saw very limited evidence of any kind of learning going on. There were various reasons for this. We have been talking a lot up until now in this session about the political level of leadership, but it is actually the technical or bureaucratic level that is



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equally striking. It just was not organised in a way that allowed the official people in charge in the Gender Equality Unit in the FCO even to have line of sight to all the activities that were going on under this banner, which made it very difficult for them. That is one of the reasons why we recommended an institutional home that would allow that oversight, and we hope they will have found some solution to make this happen. If you do not have that line of sight, you are not going to gather the evidence and learning in order to improve the programmes.

Paul Kirby has just raised the question of whether a better approach might have been to learn from the overall work that was being done by the former Department for International Development looking at gender-based violence, which did establish that, in terms of numbers, the largest amount of gender-based violence in conflict settings related to intimate-partner violence as opposed to external violence. If you wanted to make the biggest difference on the numbers, that is where you would focus.

As we have heard, the point of this initiative was to bring together the particular capabilities of the UK as represented by the three Departments. DFID so far was the strongest on evidence. Now, as you say, we have a merged Department. In fact, in the way they have structured the Department, under the DG for delivery, there is now a Research and Evidence Division. In principle, the thinking is that the programmes and the diplomacy will be influenced by that. That will be an organisational challenge. If FCDO were here, I am sure they would acknowledge that this is a work in progress. At this stage, they have not gone below the DG level for the integration, because merging Departments is not a quick business.

Nevertheless, I would agree that opportunities present themselves here. The fact that we have done this review and you are following up with this inquiry is useful, because at some point I am sure that Ministers will come before you and there will be a further opportunity to press them on it. Certainly, we hope that will happen when our follow-up report is produced. As we are now, there is really some way to go on integrating what works. Admittedly, it is true that it is hard to find out clearly what works in this very specific and narrow field, but we do know some things, such as starting from survivors. So far even that has not been consistently implemented.

Q237 Mr Sharma: My question is for Dr Kirby. Does the evidence suggest that progress has been made in preventing sexual violence in conflict since the global summit was held in 2014? Is sexual violence against men, women or children any less likely in conflict zones as a result of actions taken since then?

Dr Kirby: It would not be possible to draw any bold claim of that sort, in the sense of there being identifiable reductions in sexual and gender-based violence in conflict since the summit. It would be very difficult to attribute that directly to PSVI in itself. I am hesitant of putting



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that burden of proof on a single Government initiative, because we are talking about a large number of conflict settings and a diversity of causes.

To follow up on Dr Barton's point and coming from the ICAI review, one of the difficulties in establishing whether there are those causal effects or impacts is the fragmentation of PSVI work. The ICAI report identified at least 114 separate projects funded through PSVI. In the information I have been able to access, the median budget for those projects was about £80,000, maybe £120,000 on average. We are talking about relatively small interventions in a large number of contexts, often working across different parts of the piece. Some of them are targeting stigma and social norms; some of them are around training and evidence collection; some of them are around working with militaries. With a programme that fragmented, it will be very difficult to establish a single form of change like that.

I should also probably say, in PSVI's defence, that its focus, at least initially, was on international criminal justice and the impunity question. Those are processes that in themselves take an extraordinarily long amount of time to feed through, especially if we expect that any deterrent effect would be in subsequent conflicts, rather than in the conflicts the prosecution is focused on.

There are some tensions there that are specific to PSVI and the choices that were made early on around what to focus on, but they also come from the fragmented nature of the programme.

Q238 Mr Sharma: What progress has been made by countries like the UK in delivering on the commitments they made at the summit. Is this progress being tracked in any way? Can we hear from Baroness Helic and then Dr Barton?

Baroness Helic: I wonder whether Dr Barton may want to say something first, because she has looked into this very closely and in very fine detail. If you do not mind, I will answer second.

Dr Barton: I am happy to do that. The summit was an extraordinary event and an enormous opportunity. A huge number of people, including survivors, contributed to that and gained great hope of what might happen. It is very striking, looking back now at what actually happened, to see how little of that promise was in fact fulfilled.

Of course, it is an incredibly high ambition even to reduce the amount of sexual violence, but it was not really set up in the right way to have an impact at all. For example, there was no establishment of any detail on what pledges there would be, what milestones or objectives there would be or what they might achieve as a result of following through on the summit. It was all left so vague that there was not anything to track. There was never any overall strategy for the PSVI. The most it ever had



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was a kind of core script that explained the three categories of programming.

As I have explained, the team that was theoretically in charge did not even have oversight of a considerable amount of the programming. £21 million out of the £55 million spent over the five years was something they had no real information about. It was never set up in a way that allowed a good chance of using those resources in the best way, and that was what really struck us as an enormous missed opportunity.

It is true that some of the problems existed. It is always going to be challenging to do an initiative across three Departments. Co-operation between the Departments improved, but they had very different visions and approaches. As I have mentioned, the leadership in terms of the bureaucratic organisation, not just the political one, was not there to capitalise on this extraordinary and unusual thing the UK had done by having a Cabinet Minister, the Foreign Minister originally, leading on this.

To that extent, we felt we really could not give it anything other than an amber-red score when it came to looking at what we considered about the success of the initiative.

Baroness Helic: If I may, as someone who was there at the birth of this summit and this initiative, the summit was not about a moment where sexual violence was going to be eradicated, because there is no summit, no UN Security Council resolution, no G8 resolution, no piece of academic research and no ICAI report that can say, "From this moment, because we have assessed it and measured it, we are going to successfully eradicate this problem". Anyone who thinks that is a starting point is going to lose.

However, the starting point was understanding the enormity of this problem. This is not only something that happened in DRC, Central African Republic, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti or Germany in 1945. This has been part and parcel of every conflict. We decided that, because it is so widespread and because, as Dr Kirby said, there are so many strands of it, shamefully for humanity, we decided to focus very narrowly, because PSVI was seen and envisaged as a part of foreign policy. It was a foreign-policy initiative, because if you act like this with impunity, you sow the seeds of further conflict. If you do not address the impunity, you cannot succeed.

Our understanding and our starting point were that this was the moment to raise the profile of a crime that has been invisible. Every time you have an outbreak of war, every time you have a peace deal, does anyone ever remember that there is a powerful UN Security Council resolution that says, "We are going to revisit this in two years' time or five years' time and see how many prosecutions have taken place in order to address this crime"? This is like an afterthought; it is like a footnote. Every single conflict has this problem. Usually, in 98% of cases, it is



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against women and girls, but it is also against men and boys. It remains a footnote.

The point was to raise the issue for hundreds of civil society groups, NGOs and survivors. The point was to give them something to come together around so they, together with the Governments and international institutions, et cetera, can make a difference. We have always understood that this was going to be a moment to elevate this issue, to take it out of the darkness and say, "Look, this is what is happening; we never bring justice to the survivors".

If you ask me how I measure whether there was a success or failure, if there are 120 smaller projects, or however many, these projects are good because making a change is about changing the attitudes, and you cannot order a change of attitude. You have to educate people; you have to constantly work. You have to work in this country or that country; you have to give this speech and write that op-ed; you have to introduce this mechanism and that mechanism. Then you will eventually see some success, hopefully within our lifetime. Probably in 20 or 30 years' time, we will be in a healthier state, where we can say that this is as bad a crime as cluster munitions, the use of chemical weapons or land mines. Why do we not have a rule that says you cannot use this weapon against populations? When you do this, you do not only destroy the individual; you destroy their family, their community and their whole ethnic group. That is a really important issue that I would like to mention.

One thing that the summit also focused on is how we are going to take this forward. One idea we had at the time—we still think it is one thing that is missing in this—is that what we require is deterrents. In order to see these deterrents, you have to have accountability. The majority of women who have been hurt in this way, who have suffered this trauma, never see justice.

If you think about it, if someone gets murdered or if someone gets raped in the United Kingdom, in America or France, you do not send an NGO to help them; you send investigators or the police. You say, "This is how we are going to stop this. This is going to be outlawed". We have never outlawed this. In any case, we use NGOs or generous aid to treat a trauma, and that is never going to be a full answer to this question. It is a part of the answer, but the major answer is going to come when impunity has been replaced with accountability, when the life of a woman, wherever she is, in the Balkans, in Africa or wherever, is worth something.

Chair: Baroness, you have made that point most forcefully, and it is one we support.

Q239 Mr Sharma: Thank you, Baroness, for such a detailed response to the real issue, which is very close to the heart of many of us in society.

Baroness, if you could briefly add to your previous answer, did HMG's



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support for Rohingya women and girls in Cox's Bazar, specifically in terms of the sexual violence inflicted by Myanmar forces, match up to the regional expectation that you, William Hague, Angelina Jolie and others had of the UK PSVI?

Baroness Helic: I will try to be short. The answer is no. I believe there was an investigative team—I do not know the numbers, but I know it was probably fewer than three people—deployed at some point. Can anyone explain to me how you interview or assess those who claim to have been raped or sexually assaulted among 850,000 people who crossed from Myanmar into Bangladesh in summer and autumn two years ago with such a small team? No. In the ideal scenario, we would have had a team of some 50 investigators deployed, and they would have been there in order to take evidence from those who have alleged to have suffered that crime. That has not happened. I have not seen the report, but at some point a few people were sent to Cox's Bazar. My answer is no.

Q240 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** I would just like to ask everybody this question, please. Is the UK currently dedicating enough ministerial power, funding and resources to achieve its goals regarding ending impunity for sexual violence in conflict?

Baroness Helic: There is ministerial presence, but, as I said, if you want to have power, it has to come from the very top. That means the Prime Minister has to give it his support. If the Foreign Secretary is not in the driving seat, he has to give it the necessary support. At the moment, neither of the two major planks of this policy success are in place and active.

Dr Barton: It is evident that, clearly, Lord Ahmad, who is the special envoy, has a lot of other duties. I understand the UK is the only country that does have a special envoy, so that is a positive thing. Having said that, he does combine that with a lot of other roles. We were obviously keen to talk to him in the process of the review, and it was not possible. It seems unfortunate that it was not possible for him to join us today. That probably suggests there has not been enough time to focus on this.

When we did our report and came out with our assessment, this was not an assessment suggesting that a reaction would be to close down the initiative because it was a bad initiative; rather, it was that there should be more focus. In the response from the Government, we did get a positive response that this remained a top priority for the Government. We certainly hope to see that is the case going forward, and we hope we would see that in terms of the ministerial engagement.

Dr Kirby: Clearly, there has not been as much ministerial engagement in the last few years as there was at the start. The leadership that comes from ministerial work is clearly also very important in and of itself, although it is more of an open question about whether or not by wishing for more engagement we are looking to replicate the same kinds of diplomatic manoeuvres that were key to the summit and the period



before the summit, to bring back in Dr Barton's point about the various levels of the initiative and where other work is taking place. Again, there is a particular opportunity here, with the merger in the FCDO, to think about how some of that more technical programmatic expertise might be better resourced rather than necessarily looking to bold diplomatic action, which can produce impressive scenes but does not always translate into practice on the ground.

Q241 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** On that point, is the Government's PSVI portfolio focused on the right priorities? Is it comprehensive enough?

Dr Kirby: There is an unanswered question about strategy. There are choices here. Not all of it can be tackled at the same time. Not all of it belongs to the same piece of work.

One of the things the ICAI review was very good at was drawing attention to that absence of strategy. In the Government's response to the ICAI review there was a promise of a forthcoming three-year strategy, but I note when the House of Lords had a Select Committee on PSVI some time ago, back in 2016, there was also the ask for a more comprehensive strategy at that point, which was not taken up.

It is impossible to answer in the absence of such a strategy that really explains the mechanisms of change and, frankly, justifies some of the choices in terms of what is not being done and not being looked at. Ideally, it would justify that in relation to the overall international activity on this issue rather than treating the UK as a solo actor or insisting that the UK has the leadership role in all cases.

Dr Barton: Those sound like very important comments for the Government to think about, as we hope they are developing their strategy. There were some things that struck us. There can be some justification for tackling different strands rather than focusing on just one area, but clearly the UK Government should focus on where it has the most assets and on joining them up.

If I take a practical example, all of the diplomatic work with the UN and the work with OIOS on establishing the international protocol could have much greater impact, both at the high end and the low end, through work at the grassroots level to bring the international protocol into practice. Interestingly enough, in Myanmar we had one very good example with the NGO, Cord, where that was happening. It was actually making a difference to justice on the ground. We also saw that in DRC.

Out of the 114 projects, imagine there had been, let us say, 50 devoted to that. You could have had a body of evidence as to what works and fed that back into the guidance at UN level and disseminated it. There is that kind of synergy point, where the opportunities were missing.

As I said earlier, there was another very problematic point for us. One of the few things we know from the literature is how important it is that



survivors are actually the architects of programmes. The whole issue of conflict-related sexual violence is that it takes away that agency from people, normally women and girls. Having that agency, direction and involvement in what happens and what the priorities are at every level is very important. The Foreign Office was good at involving people at the steering-group level, but the absolute basic ethical protocols were not in place at the ground level. That is one of the biggest areas where change needs to happen. We would welcome any strategy that prioritises better the resources there are and links up better the different assets the UK Government have.

Baroness Helic: Thank you very much for the question. I would agree with both the previous speakers. There is a necessity to have a clarity of vision and a strategy in place. I also welcome the Government's response to the ICAI report and the commitment to have a strategy in place, but one is yet to emerge; I am not aware that there is one in place.

Considering that we started from wanting to tackle impunity, I sincerely hope that strategy will include a proposal for the creation of an independent international investigative body as a recognised international authority that is able to facilitate the achievement of accountability where there has been none so far.

If I can just go back to a previous point, in terms of what was available on a technical level in the Department, the Foreign Secretary is responsible when it comes to how much funding and how much focus something is being given. You can only do it on a technical level internally if you have a team in place, and that team needs to have funding and to have a direction of travel.

I have often found that the diplomats on the ground were not given that direction, resources were very small or team numbers were shrunk to the point where they had to do everything—PSVI, child soldiers, women's rights and LGBTQ issues. Every single issue under the sky fell into the basket of PSVI, and that increased pressures on the staff but also created an element of confusion around what takes priority. What is it really that we are working on?

Q242 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** What impact has the PSVI team of experts had in tackling sexual violence in conflict zones?

Baroness Helic: It has been deployed on several occasions. Since 2018, it has been deployed on 11 occasions. I do not have the locations, et cetera. The impact will obviously best be measured in times to come as to what evidence was collected, what the impact of that evidence was on the outcomes and any inclusion of that evidence in the diplomatic and other work that the Department would have undertaken. That is a longer-term assessment of the impact that it will have had.

We started with 75-plus experts who were available on a roster and could be called upon in cases of emergency. That number has decreased



substantially. Because the roster has not been deployed and maintained regularly, it has probably lost some of its internal strength and cohesion in the sense of it being a mechanism that would be able to deliver on the idea of these experts being deployed, collecting the evidence, using the protocol and helping the organisations on the ground in emergencies.

Dr Kirby: My understanding is certainly that the experts have been deployed less often as the initiative has progressed. I certainly wish it was possible to say more about what the impact of some of those experts has been. As somebody who tries to research this, it has been difficult to get that information. To some extent, that is understandable. As Baroness Helic pointed out, materials that are collected around the evidence of crimes may take some time to bear fruit and for us to see at tribunals that may be convened in the future. There is also an element that is less understandable around transparency and the ability to evaluate the work of the initiative as it goes on.

There is one other thing to say about the team of experts, which goes to the point I have made a few times now about the interaction between the PSVI as a national Government initiative and the broader ecology. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General also oversees a team of experts based at the UN who have a role in some of these spaces, in particular in joining up with the mechanisms that exist at the international level, whether those are around sanctions or reporting to the Security Council on the wider women, peace and security agenda, which we have not really touched on.

My understanding from interviews with some people in the know is that at least in the initial stages there was something of a clash or a tension between the role that was being seen for the UK team of experts and the international team of experts. Whatever the causes of that were, it speaks to an absence of strategy, again, around how to link up those different elements of the sexual-violence ecosystem, if you will.

Dr Barton: I would just briefly add to that. Of course, we had access to such information as there was about these deployments. In all of our inquiries and field visits, we asked about them. It was very clear that there was minimal join-up between their activities and what was happening elsewhere, so there were a lot of opportunities being missed.

As you have heard, originally there were 27 deployments in 2014. It was down to 10 in 2018. In between, it had gone even lower. We heard about all sorts of practical issues that were preventing them being deployed. There was simply not very good management. They were obviously not a high priority for where they were being managed. The funding was uncertain. As a result, it seemed there was almost no evidence of what had been achieved, so it was a real opportunity missed.

Q243 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** On that point, Dr Barton, is there evidence that the FCDO is still prioritising and dispatching experts from the PSVI team of experts to assist in conflict zones? I am thinking of the Rohingya



refugee camps, for example.

Dr Barton: Unfortunately, this hearing has been delayed. Our report came out in January, so our evidence is very old on this. We did get a very positive response to our report from the Government. Hope always springs eternal when it comes to the follow-up. Sometimes we are not disappointed. This is definitely something we will be asking about and hopefully telling you about in Parliament.

Q244 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** The next thing I wanted to ask the panel about was the support for victims. What do victims and survivors need? Are the UK Government doing enough in consulting and supporting them?

Dr Barton: It is a theme I have alluded to more than once, because it is just so fundamental for the moral reasons that I outlined that programmes start from survivors' priorities and perspectives. It is also a very practical one. You have heard from Dr Kirby about the incredible diversity of contexts and types of conflict-related sexual violence. In each case you need to have rather specific locally rooted responses, and that always needs to start with survivors.

It is to the credit of the FCDO that, at the highest level, that they have representation on their steering group, but that needs to be a systematic way in which the programmes work. It goes back to this problem of a lack of oversight and a lack of principles under which the programmes are run.

A partial exception to this is the CSSF, because, as I mentioned, in response to ICAI's review they brought in a number of minimum standards for programmes. There you will find more on ethical protocols, for example, because that was a response to some of our earlier critiques. At least when we were looking at the programmes, you could not actually see that; it was not a requirement. None of these programmes seemed to start in a systematic way except with the minimal standards required by the CSSF.

Dr Kirby: I do not have a huge amount to add except maybe to sound a slight note of caution. It is important to reflect a little bit on what we mean when we say a programme or an initiative is designed around survivors or by survivors. It is very clear that survivors need to be at the heart of programmes that deal with survivors, and part of the shift in PSVI towards the stigma element has necessarily therefore meant that discussions with survivors at a higher pace.

However, there is a more open question around what the role of survivors could or should be in other parts of PSVI's work, like the training, documentary standards and prevention. I am a little bit wary of potentially instrumentalising survivors as the face of some of that work where there might be technical expertise or other questions that survivors are not best placed to offer.



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There has been at times and in some quarters a sense that survivors were brought in quite late to work that was about them and asked to provide a stamp of authority or legitimacy on that. From a “do no harm” perspective, it is really important that the initiative avoids even the appearance of that in future.

I would just finally say that the survivor experience itself is very multi-faceted, partly because survivors are negotiating different national contexts in which even the terminology has different valences. For example, in Colombia, because the terminology of “victim” carries a particular set of rights and an ability to draw on the funds of the state, I know that survivors prefer to refer to themselves at times as victims because of that relationship. That will differ depending on the context of conflict we are talking about. We need to be a bit careful not to treat survivors as a monolithic entity.

Baroness Helic: I would just like to make two points. First, when it comes to bringing survivors in, the summit was probably the only one of its kind, where survivors actually participated in it. Prior to that, experts and survivors were involved in drafting documentation protocol. That was a departure from what usually happens in these circumstances, as both witnesses said, where survivors come at a later stage.

I often struggle with the idea that all we can and should be offering to survivors, when we are working with survivors, is some kind of remedy to what has happened to them in terms of de-stigmatisation and support. Those are absolutely needed and necessary, but from my experience—I must say I have met many survivors on almost every continent over the last 15 years—one message I have received from every survivor I have ever spoken to, be it a girl, a woman, a boy or a man is the necessity for justice, so the harm is recognised and someone has been held accountable for it.

Often, we lose that in the process of trying to work with the survivors and help them move forward from the harm that has been done to them. This most difficult part of tackling sexual violence is something we have not yet managed to conquer.

Chair: Thank you very much to all of the witnesses. I now need to bring this session to a close. If we have follow-up questions, we will write, if that is okay, and you can supply answers. It has been a fascinating session today. The first half looked at sexual violence and abuse perpetrated by peacekeepers. I fail to understand why this keeps on happening. We have to change the culture, and the UK really can have a leading role in this. I do not want another session where I keep on hearing about the perception of impunity that these perpetrators have.

This session was on sexual violence in conflict zones. Again, I am very proud that the UK took a strong leading role in preventing this sort of abuse. Baroness Helic, it was very profound when you said this has always been a form of violence against women and girls perpetrated as a



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war crime, and we have to change it once and for all. It seems from the ICAI report that there is not the overall strategy and leadership that we had a few years ago, and I really hope the Government are able to bring that direction back to the table. Potentially, the creation of FCDO is an ideal vehicle to do that. We see the integrated review coming forward in the next few months, so I hope this is a key part of that strategy going forward and is able to reposition the UK as a leading light to prevent sexual violence in conflict and by peacekeepers. Thank you all very much for taking part.