



HOUSE OF LORDS

Revised transcript of evidence taken before

The Select Committee on Sexual Violence in Conflict

Inquiry on

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

Evidence Session No 6

Heard in Public

Questions 40 - 41

TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2015

4.40 pm

Witness: Ms Chitra Nagarajan

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on
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Members present

Bishop of Derby (Chairman)
 Lord Black of Brentwood
 Baroness Goudie
 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon
 Baroness Hodgson of Abinger
 Baroness Hussein-Ece
 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead
 Lord Sterling of Plaistow
 Baroness Warsi
 Lord Williams of Elvel
 Baroness Young of Hornsey

In the absence of the Chairman, the Bishop of Derby was called to the Chair

Examination of Witness

Ms Chitra Nagarajan, Gender and Conflict Adviser, Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme, and former Director, Gender Action for Peace and Security (via videolink)

Q40 The Chairman: Friends, we are on to panel 2. We have an agreed order of questions. Can I welcome Ms Ms Chitra Nagarajan? Can you hear us?

Ms Chitra Nagarajan: I can, thank you very much.

The Chairman: Thank you so much for joining us. I need to say one or two things to set the context. This is a formal evidence-taking session of the Committee. A full note will be taken, which goes on the public record. It will also be on the parliamentary website. You will be sent a copy of the transcript and, if you want to suggest minor alterations, they can be made. The session is being webcast live and will be on the parliamentary website. After the session, you are very welcome to submit any written evidence if you would like to add anything to your replies to the questions. As we begin, I will ask you to make any opening statement you would like to make to us, and then we have six or seven questions, if we have time, that we would like you to answer, please. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Chitra Nagarajan: Thank you very much. Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to the Committee. All of us who are working in the field of women, peace and security are very heartened to see the increasing attention that has been paid to preventing sexual violence in conflict in recent years. The UK maintaining its strong position as a leader internationally on this agenda is really welcome. I am looking forward very much to speaking more to you about the reality in situations of violent conflict such as Nigeria, where I am currently living and working, and talking to you about what more the UK and other members of the international community can do. I have not really prepared an opening statement, but I welcome your questions and I am looking forward to hearing what you have to ask me.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed.

Q41 Baroness Young of Hornsey: Good afternoon. What are the kinds of factors in place that heighten the risk of sexual violence in conflict? How should such factors affect the responses of the international community and NGOs? Is there a way of having some kind of early-warning system that will help to mitigate some of the worst aspects of such situations?

Ms Chitra Nagarajan: Thank you very much for that question. Before I answer it, I would just like to reiterate that sexual violence is both the cause and the consequence of gender inequality. We need to see the broader links between what happens to women and girls—to some men and boys too, but it is predominantly to women and girls—reflecting partly what happens in part of the society.

In terms of the factors that heighten the risk of sexual violence, first I should mention violent masculinities. The NSRP recently conducted some research in Nigeria looking at masculinities and the relationship between masculinities, conflict and violence. We found that where men, especially young men, need to prove masculinity in certain ways and where masculinity is linked to earning money to support a family and to being married, there is a link with sexual violence in conflict. In the north-east of Nigeria, for example, where we have been seeing insecurity due to conflict between the forces of Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad, commonly known as Boko Haram, and the Nigerian armed forces, you have lots of young men joining the group because they feel that doing so gives them so-called access to young women who have been abducted. Really, when we are looking at sexual violence in conflict, we need to address the role of violent masculinities as well as looking at women's vulnerabilities.

I would also like to talk about the ways in which services are constructed and the lack of consultation with the women concerned. Some of my work is working with women and girls with disabilities, and we have found that in IDP camps in particular, women and girls with disabilities are at heightened risk of sexual violence, because those camps are not accessible, because no effort is being made to reach out to them and because, quite frankly, it is a matter of survival of the fittest in which women and girls with disabilities do not have any access to food and other services and are therefore forced to exchange sex in return for food as men offer to so-called help them, and that is really their only way of surviving.

I would also like to talk a bit about military cultures. We find that in a lot of armed forces and armed groups there is really a culture of impunity. Either there is no policy on sexual exploitation or abuse, or if there is a policy it is not followed in practice. When I talk to military officials, I hear either, "These things do not happen—not in our military" or, "Well, what can you expect? These men are so far away from their homes". There is this overwhelming feeling that violence is normal. That really needs to change. If you have a culture where sexual violence is seen as something natural for men to do to "satisfy their urges", that leads to a heightened risk of it happening in such a context.

I am sorry. What was the second half of your question?

Baroness Young of Hornsey: It was about what the implications of what you have just said are for the actions of NGOs and the international community. How can we do something that will have an impact on those ways of thinking? The other question I was going to ask you was whether you had any examples of campaigns, organisations or individuals that have

successfully challenged or that are beginning to have a positive impact on these very negative attitudes towards women. Sorry, did you hear that?

Ms Chitra Nagarajan: I did. I am sorry. The connection is cutting in and out a bit, so it is a bit difficult to hear everything, but I caught the gist of it.

The Chairman: We are picking up most of it, so keep going.

Ms Chitra Nagarajan: On the question of what the international community can do to impact negative ways of thinking, and promising signs—I hope I caught the gist of that question—there is a lot that countries such as the UK and others in the international community can do when it comes to looking at military cultures. The UK and other countries already try to do a lot. We have seen increasing attention being paid to issues of sexual abuse and exploitation at the international level—the UN level—but we really need to make sure that that translates into practice on the ground.

I would say that number one is looking at who makes up these militaries: armed forces and peacekeeping forces. We know that only 3% of international military peacekeeping forces are women. We know that means that there is a hyper-masculinised culture there. A very good example is the all-female contingent of the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia, which meant that not only did Liberian women not feel at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation by peacekeeping forces but they also felt more able to go out and engage with them on their own security concerns, including concerns about sexual violence.

We also need to look at training. The UK did some very promising work in Mali recently, whereby the armed forces were trained on gender, sexual abuse and exploitation. That is something—

The Chairman: We seem to have lost you. We cannot hear you very clearly. We will either have to restore this connection or ask you to answer our questions in writing, if you are willing to do that.

[Due to technical difficulties the evidence session was unable to continue]