

APPG on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative response to the International Development Committee inquiry into the 'Effectiveness of UK Aid'

Executive Summary

To improve the effectiveness of UK aid, the APPG on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative has reviewed the UK Government's work on this initiative and recommends that:

1. Overall responsibility for PSVI should be restored to the Foreign Secretary.
2. The PSVI Unit should be institutionally ring-fenced with a fixed strategy, team size, and human resources budget to ensure its objectives, strategy and structures are clearly defined and maintained.
3. The Government should pursue a longer-term approach to PSVI, by extending the timeframe of their forthcoming PSVI strategy, setting out a longer-term funding cycle for PSVI, and exempting PSVI projects from the FCO's 80% spending rule.
4. A proportion of the UK's international development budget should be allocated and ringfenced towards tackling gender-based violence.
5. A new international and independent, technical expert body or mechanism should be created to collect and preserve evidence of conflict-related sexual violence and help bring perpetrators to justice.
6. The Government should use the forthcoming international conference, 'Time for Justice', to revitalise the UK's approach to PSVI, inspire other countries to follow our lead, and reassert our dominance on this global issue.

Introduction

The UK Government's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) aims to eradicate impunity related to using rape as a weapon of war. The Initiative seeks to achieve this through a global campaign to: ¹

- end impunity for perpetrators;
- deter and prevent sexual violence;
- support and recognise survivors; and
- change the global attitudes that fuel these crimes.

Our All-Party Parliamentary Group was set up to support the Government in delivering on these ambitions.

We welcome the International Development Committee's inquiry and the opportunity it provides to give evidence on the effectiveness of UK aid spent on PSVI.

¹ FCO, WMS, [14.07.14](#)

We hope the work of our APPG, including this submission, will help feed into discussions on the future of the Initiative at the forthcoming international conference on PSVI, 'Time for Justice', which is to be rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.² We also believe that PSVI can be used as an example of how the effectiveness of UK aid can be improved upon more broadly.

The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative

The Government's PSVI programme was launched in 2012, by the then Foreign Secretary, Lord Hague and UN Human Rights Council Special Envoy Angelina Jolie to raise awareness of the extent of sexual violence and galvanise governments across the world to work together to end it.³

PSVI is a cross-departmental initiative, led by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and supported by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). It is led by a PSVI team within the Gender Equality Unit at the FCO, under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon.⁴

The early years of the Initiative were met with remarkable success. In September 2013, UK leadership on this issue led to over two-thirds of UN Member States to endorse the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict.⁵

A year later, the then Foreign Secretary Lord Hague and Special Envoy Jolie co-hosted a Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, bringing together 1,700 high-level delegates, including politicians, celebrities, and survivors.⁶ This led to the launch of the first International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict, which sets out a series of standards and best practices to help survivors overcome the barriers to pursuing justice.⁷

Following the Summit, however, the work of the Initiative has drifted. As a recent report (see next section) from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) notes 'Following Lord Hague's departure from the post of foreign secretary soon after the Global Summit, high-level ministerial interest waned, and funding and staffing levels for the PSVI team were reduced.'⁸

² FCO, PR, [14.04.20](#)

³ FCO, Speech, [29.05.12](#)

⁴ ICAI, 'Report: The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative', [09.01.20](#)

⁵ FCO, Policy paper, [24.09.13](#)

⁶ PSVI, 'Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict', [link](#)

⁷ FCO, Report, [29.12.14](#)

⁸ ICAI, 'Report: The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative', [09.01.20](#)

ICAI Report

In January 2020, the ICAI published a report on the success of the UK's PSVI programme, concluding that, while the Initiative was 'an important body of work on a neglected topic' its activity since 2014 'falls short of the government's stated ambitions'.⁹

In their report, the ICAI made four recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Initiative:

1. The UK government should ensure that the important issue of preventing sexual violence in conflict is given an institutional home which enables both full oversight and direction, while also maximising the particular strengths and contributions of each participating department.
2. The UK government should ensure that its programming activities on preventing sexual violence in conflict are embedded within a structure which supports the effective design, monitoring and evaluation, and enables long-term impact.
3. The UK government should ensure that its work on preventing conflict-related sexual violence is founded on survivor-led design, which has clear protocols in place founded in 'do no harm' principles.
4. The UK government should build a systematic learning process into its programming to support the generation of evidence of what works in addressing conflict-related sexual violence and ensure effective dissemination and uptake across its portfolio of activities.

Responding to the report, the Government partially accepted the first recommendation, arguing that 'PSVI has always had an institutional home in the FCO'. They fully accepted the other three recommendations and also committed to:¹⁰

- Develop a three-year strategy on PSVI;
- Continue to regularly review and improve PSVI programme design processes; and
- Consider ways to ensure more systematic lesson learning to end conflict-related sexual violence.

Our Recommendations

Our APPG welcomes the ICAI's report and the commitments made in the Government's response. That said, we remain concerned that the Government's response does not adequately address some of the important issues raised by the ICAI.

In order to further improve the effectiveness of the UK's PSVI programme, our APPG makes the following recommendations:

⁹ ICAI, 'Report: The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative', [09.01.20](#)

¹⁰ DFID, Government Response, [20.02.20](#)

1. Overall responsibility for PSVI should be restored to the Foreign Secretary.

While our APPG welcomes the Government's commitment to developing a three-year cross-departmental strategy for PSVI, we feel that more needs to be done to coordinate activity on tackling conflict-related sexual violence across Whitehall.

Although the Government is technically correct in responding to the ICAI report that the FCO is already the official institutional home of PSVI, we feel their reply fails to grasp the wider point that cross-departmental leadership on the Initiative is lacking.

Ending rape as a weapon of war is an ambitious aim and one that needs to run through all aspects of the Government's foreign policy if it is to be achieved. As such, while noting the important contribution of Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon to the PSVI programme, we do not believe responsibility for PSVI should be held at the junior minister level.

We are therefore calling on the role of the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict to be restored to the Secretary of State level. The Foreign Secretary reclaiming responsibility for PSVI would also demonstrate a renewed resolve by the Government to revitalise the PSVI programme.

2. The PSVI Unit should be institutionally ring-fenced with a fixed strategy, team size, and human resources budget to ensure its objectives, strategy and structures are clearly defined and maintained.

Ending conflict-related violence is a huge task and we welcome that PSVI is complemented by similar Government programmes, such as the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG) and the UK's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). While there is a great deal of overlap between PSVI, VAWG, and the WPS, each specialises in specific policy areas. For example, the PSVI programme supports men and boys who are victims of conflict-related sexual violence, while VAWG's activities 'almost entirely engage men and boys as (potential) perpetrators'.¹¹ As such, together, these three programmes are even greater than the sum of their parts.

Our APPG was therefore disappointed to read in the ICAI's report that 'some government stakeholders explained that the UK's National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security serves as the PSVI's strategic plan'.¹² The Government's commitment to a defined three-year PSVI strategy is a welcome step towards ensuring PSVI continues as a distinct initiative, but more certainty is required.

We are therefore calling on the Government to institutionally ring-fence the PSVI Unit by fixing its team size and annual human resources budget for the duration of the forthcoming multi-year PSVI strategy.

¹¹ ICAI, 'Report: The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative', [09.01.20](#)

¹² ICAI, 'Report: The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative', [09.01.20](#)

3. The Government should pursue a longer-term approach to PSVI, by extending the timeframe of their forthcoming PSVI strategy, setting out a longer-term funding cycle for PSVI, and exempting PSVI projects from the FCO's 80% spending rule.

As outlined above, we welcome the Government's commitment to developing a three-year strategy for PSVI. That said, bringing an end to the use of rape as a weapon of war requires addressing the deep-rooted causes and effects of this sexual violence.

This is not achievable through a series of short-term strategies. We would prefer to see a longer-term strategy, similar to the Government's 25 Year Environmental Plan. As such, we are calling on the Government to extend the timeframe of their forthcoming PSVI strategy beyond the planned three years.

We also note the ICAI's conclusion that 'The FCO's one-year funding cycle has restricted the Initiative's ability to address deep-rooted issues', by encouraging project partners to focus on addressing symptoms and short-term fixes. Furthermore, the ICAI found that the FCO's 80% rule - requiring that 80% of funds be spent by December of each financial year - can lead to partners spending PSVI funds 'very fast, with disregard for the quality of programmes' to complete spending before the funding cycle ended.¹³

We are therefore calling on the FCO to set out a longer-term funding cycle for PSVI at the forthcoming Spending Review and to exempt PSVI projects from the FCO's 80% spending rule.

4. A proportion of the UK's international development budget should be allocated and ringfenced towards tackling gender-based violence.

Aside from problems with the process of funding PSVI projects, the ICAI also raised their concerns regarding the level of overall funding made available for PSVI. The report found that funding for the PSVI Unit at the FCO fell from £15 million in 2014-15 to just under £2 million in 2018-19, a drop of 87%.¹⁴

We note the success that the decision to ring-fence the international development budget at 0.7% of Gross National Income since 2012 has had in supporting vulnerable people across the world. It has led to more than 32 million people, including at least 10 million women and girls, being supported by the Department for International Development since 2015 alone.¹⁵

Baroness Helic and Chloe Dalton have argued that the Government 'should announce that the UK will devote a minimum 1% of the International Development budget' for fighting sexual and gender-based violence, to prevent any funding shortfall in these areas.¹⁶ Our APPG supports this proposal and we are confident that such action by our Government would help to inspire like-minded allies across the globe to do the same.

¹³ ICAI, 'Report: The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative', [09.01.20](#)

¹⁴ ICAI, 'Report: The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative', [09.01.20](#)

¹⁵ DFID, WMS, [28.10.19](#)

¹⁶ Baroness Helic and Chloe Dalton, 'The victims of sexual violence in war have no #MeToo hashtag to highlight their story', *Conservative Home*, [14.04.18](#)

We are therefore calling on the Government to ring-fence a proportion of the UK's international development budget for PSVI and the related issue of tackling gender-based violence.

5. A new international and independent, technical expert body should be created to collect and preserve evidence of conflict-related sexual violence and help bring perpetrators to justice.

The UK's PSVI team of experts have been deployed over 90 times since the Initiative was set up in 2012, training and supporting others to collect evidence on conflict-related sexual violence.¹⁷ By doing so, these experts help to inform prosecutions and perpetrators to justice, thereby delivering some degree of closure to survivors and deterring others from committing such atrocities.

While the prosecution of such war criminals is crucial to PSVI, the collection of evidence to secure a conviction can be difficult. For example, when responding to a previous inquiry by the International Development Committee on the Rohingya crisis, the Government conceded that the 'continuing restrictions on access into northern Rakhine ... makes it extremely difficult for ... credible bodies to gather evidence in Burma'.¹⁸

The difficulties in collecting evidence of the widely reported Burmese atrocities on the Rohingya is just one example of where the current approach to supporting evidence collection has encountered difficulties. As such, a new, more robust approach to evidence collection is required.

We are therefore calling for the creation of a new international and independent, technical expert body. Staffed by investigators, criminal lawyers, and analysts, this body would collect and preserve evidence of conflict-related sexual violence and help determine grounds for criminal prosecutions. We hope the UK Government will consider the merits of such a body and raise them with international allies at the earliest opportunity. The forthcoming international conference on PSVI, 'Time for Justice', would be an appropriate opportunity to discuss such proposals at length.

6. The Government should use the forthcoming international conference, 'Time for Justice', to revitalise the UK's approach to PSVI, inspire other countries to follow our lead, and reassert our dominance on this global issue.

The international conference on PSVI, 'Time for Justice: Putting Survivors First', was scheduled to take place between 18 and 20 November 2019, but this was delayed due to the 2019 General Election.¹⁹ Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Government announced in April that the conference would be further delayed, and will announce a new date in due course.²⁰

¹⁷ Nigel Adams MP, HC Deb, [17.03.20](#)

¹⁸ DFID, Response to 'Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis', [20.03.18](#)

¹⁹ FCO, PR, [04.11.19](#)

²⁰ FCO, PR, [14.04.20](#)

As discussed above, the Global Summit of 2014 is one of the highlights in the Initiative's history, resulting in the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict. This Protocol has been used by the International Criminal Court, the UN and in countries across the world, from Syria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia and Burma, to the DRC, Iraq, Sri Lanka and Uganda.²¹

Just as the Global Summit of 2014 was a golden opportunity to set the agenda for global action on PSVI and for the UK to inspire countries around the world to follow our lead on this issue, so too is the forthcoming 'Time for Justice' conference. To ensure this opportunity is not wasted, the Government must rethink its approach to PSVI and focus on how to make the work of the Initiative as effective as possible.

Conclusion

Our APPG hopes that the recommendations set out in this inquiry response, building on those made in the recent ICAI report, will help the Government to revitalise PSVI, improve the effectiveness of the Initiative going forwards, and serve as an example to future humanitarian projects.

Anthony Mangnall MP

Chair of the APPG on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative

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²¹ FCO, WMS, [19.06.18](#)