

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security,
November 30th 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Sir Mark Lyall Grant, Permanent Mission of the UK to the United Nations.

Thank you Mr President for holding this open debate on Women, Peace and Security, marking the 12th anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1325. I would like to thank the Deputy-Secretary-General, Michelle Bachelet, Hervé Ladsous and Bineta Diop for their informative briefings this morning. I welcome the statement of the European Union that will follow later and the important contributions that they make to this agenda.

The Chinese have a powerful proverb that 'women hold up half the sky'. Twelve years after this Council first made landmark commitments in Resolution 1325, we must all stand united behind efforts to confront those who seek to exclude, harm or marginalise half their populations.

As the Secretary-General has set out in his report, we have in this Council made a concerted effort in the course of the past year to support the rights, protection and empowerment of women in strengthened peacekeeping mandates, in calls for more female peacekeepers, greater representation for women in UN leadership roles and a greater number of gender experts in UN field missions. We must respond in this Council to the Secretary-General's call to demonstrate continued and committed leadership.

Women have a unique and powerful role to play in peacebuilding. But the lack of security for women and girls continues to be a major factor inhibiting their participation in decision-making in conflict and post conflict settings. Women must participate as voters and candidates in post-conflict elections; they deserve to have the security to do so safely. Women must be placed at the centre of peace negotiations, not marginalised, threatened and ignored. And women's civil society organisations, so often at the forefront of responding to conflict and building peace in their own communities, must be nurtured, funded and supported.

The United Kingdom itself benefits substantially from early, regular and close consultation with women's civil society organisations. The United Kingdom civil society umbrella group Gender Action for Peace and Security played an integral part in our own recent National Action Plan review process.

We must do more to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and tackle more aggressively its perpetrators. This remains an urgent priority for the United Kingdom. Despite our best collective efforts, the culture of impunity that has grown up around this horrific crime is tough to crack. It is shocking how few of those responsible are put on trial for the crimes they commit. Governments must do more, and do so urgently.

In September, the United Kingdom Foreign Secretary launched a new initiative on Preventing Sexual Violence at an event co-hosted with Michelle Bachelet, Zainab Bangura, and the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict. The initiative aims to replace the culture of impunity with one of deterrence, increasing the number of perpetrators of sexual violence brought to justice. We will work closely with the United Nations, international partners and civil society to launch a sustained campaign and to build a global partnership to prevent sexual violence in conflict.

Nationally we have recruited a specialist team of experts available to work in support of the United Nations and civil society to investigate allegations of sexual violence, gather evidence and help countries build their own capacity to do so. The United Kingdom has also contributed \$1.5 million to the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict to support her team's work. We hope others will also find ways to renew their commitments.

Today we recognise in particular the invaluable contribution civil society organisations make to this agenda. Their contribution is vital. In Liberia, organisations like the Women's Situation Room help promote women's participation in political life and prevent electoral violence. In Sierra Leone, the Rainbow institution has made great strides in helping survivors of sexual and gender-based violence with medical assistance and counselling, sensitizing communities and empowering women and girls through village Savings and Loans Associations for women and girls. Such organisations deserve to be nurtured and supported.

Women often bear a disproportionate burden in all stages of conflict. We know that they play a critical part in helping a country to draw back from recent conflict, ensure sustainable peace, and heal wounds in societies torn apart by war. In that role, they surely hold up more than half the sky. We must ensure that together we support the rights, protection and empowerment of women. Like Mr Ladsous, the United Kingdom, both in our national capacity and as the Security Council lead on women, peace and security, is ready to go the extra mile to achieve that goal.

Thank you