



---

# Saferworld briefing

---

## Taking international action to prevent sexual and gender-based violence

Recommendations on the UK's G8 presidency and gender-sensitive security and justice reform

---

**Saferworld welcomes the UK Government's decision to increase its efforts to prevent sexual violence in armed conflict, both through the deployment of a UK Team of Experts and through an international diplomatic initiative to encourage other states to take action on this issue.**

Addressing sexual violence is inevitably complex, and despite increased international attention on the issue in recent years, examples of bad practice in this area are easier to identify than good ones. However, the Department for International Development (DFID) has elaborated detailed guidance for tackling violence against women and girls, which provides an invaluable resource for the UK Government and others to draw on as it further develops the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI).<sup>1</sup>

This briefing does two things: first, it recommends that the UK use its G8 presidency and accompanying diplomatic work to find new ways of encouraging the international community to fulfill its existing commitments on tackling sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). We believe that if the PSVI is to be successful, it should take a holistic approach to preventing and responding to SGBV such as that developed by DFID. Second, the briefing recommends that the UK should take a lead on promoting gender-sensitive security and justice sector reform as a key means of tackling SGBV. Saferworld believes that developing capable, accountable and responsive security and justice systems through a gender-sensitive approach can have a 'multiplier effect' on preventing SGBV in armed conflict, by improving access to justice for survivors, tackling impunity and preventing abuses by security and justice providers, and also through its contribution to upstream conflict prevention.

### Summary of recommendations

- The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and DFID should work closely together on developing the PSVI, drawing on DFID's existing guidance for tackling violence against women and girls
- The PSVI should aim to address SGBV in all its forms, rather than singling out 'rape as a weapon of war'
- The PSVI should promote an understanding that SGBV in conflict is not a wholly separate phenomenon from SGBV in peacetime; there are common causes such as gender inequality which must be tackled in all contexts
- Recognising that SGBV is used as a weapon of war by conflicting parties, the UK should see upstream conflict prevention as an important means of preventing these types of abuses
- There already exist a number of international political agreements on preventing SGBV: in the run up to the G8, the UK should conduct an analysis of the barriers to implementing these existing commitments
- Drawing on this analysis, the UK should use its G8 presidency to encourage each member state to lead on overcoming barriers to implementation of specific elements of a holistic approach to tackling SGBV
- The UK should take a lead on promoting gender-sensitive security and justice sector reform as a key part of this holistic approach

---

<sup>1</sup> Department for International Development, *A theory of change for tackling violence against women and girls* (2012).

## ‘Conflict-related sexual violence’?

The PSVI has been framed as an initiative to address “sexual violence in conflict”.<sup>2</sup> It is not clear from this whether the intention is to address conflict-related sexual violence or sexual violence occurring in conflict-affected countries. In practice, it is very difficult – if not impossible – to draw a clear distinction between sexual violence which occurs as a result of conflict, including ‘rape as a weapon of war’, and other forms of sexual violence occurring in conflict zones. Attempting to draw such a distinction can lead to the creation of a “hierarchy of victims” which makes access to justice and other services for survivors dependent on arbitrary factors such as the intent of the perpetrator.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, there is often no clear distinction between incidents of sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence. Saferworld would therefore caution against singling out conflict-related sexual violence, in favour of an approach that addresses SGBV more broadly.

Furthermore, SGBV occurring during conflict is not a wholly separate phenomenon from SGBV which occurs in the post-conflict period or in countries not affected by violent conflict. Indeed, evidence suggests it is not uncommon for the incidence of SGBV to continue or even increase after a conflict has formally ended.<sup>4</sup> While increased attention has been devoted to SGBV perpetrated by armed groups as a tactic of war, women in conflict-affected states are more likely to be victimised by their husband or other intimate partner than by strangers.<sup>5</sup> The factors which contribute to SGBV – such as gender inequality and lack of access to justice – are often the same in conflict-affected and fragile states as elsewhere. Saferworld therefore recommends that the UK’s – and international – efforts to addressing SGBV in conflict should be situated within the context of broader efforts to address SGBV wherever it occurs.

## Addressing causes as well as symptoms

SGBV, when deployed as a weapon of war, is a tactic of armed combatants. Therefore, one important means of preventing incidents of this

particular form of SGBV is to invest resources and political capital in conflict prevention. The UK Government’s *Building Stability Overseas Strategy*, published in July 2011, outlines a strong vision for how the UK can help to prevent conflict overseas by taking measures to address the root causes of conflict, and it is crucial that the UK Government now prioritises the implementation of that vision. SGBV is often a trigger factor for violent conflict, therefore preventing SGBV can be key to stopping further violence from breaking out. However, while addressing short term triggers of conflict and protecting civilians from its worst effects are worthy goals, a new emphasis on this issue must not come at the expense of increased efforts to prevent conflict upstream by addressing its long-term structural causes.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, as DFID’s theory of change recognises, SGBV is a symptom of gender inequality and the widespread prevalence of patriarchal attitudes and beliefs.<sup>7</sup> This is the case not only where violence is directed against women and girls: sexual violence against men and boys is used as a means of bringing shame and stigma which results directly from societal attitudes toward masculinity and gender roles. Therefore if the UK and others are serious about taking a long-term, preventative approach to sexual violence they must prioritise investment in measures to promote gender equality and challenge patriarchal beliefs.

While there are some common factors, the underlying causes and triggers of SGBV vary across different contexts, and it is therefore important that any interventions to address SGBV are based on sound analysis of the context. In areas affected by conflict or fragility, this should include a conflict analysis, which should be used to ensure that all interventions are conflict-sensitive – that is, they do not exacerbate conflict dynamics, and wherever possible they contribute to building peace.

### **Recognising all survivors of SGBV**

Saferworld welcomes the recognition by the UK Government that SGBV is committed against women, men, boys and girls. The available evidence suggests that women and girls make up the majority of victims/survivors, and existing research, programming and services focus almost exclusively on women and girls –

<sup>2</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Foreign Secretary announces UK initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict*, 29 May 2012, <http://www.fc.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?id=769621682&view=News> accessed 3 September 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Sahla Aroussi, ‘Women, peace and security’: addressing accountability for wartime sexual violence’ in *International Feminist Journal of Politics* (2011), vol 13:4, p 588.

<sup>4</sup> International Rescue Committee, *Let me not die before my time: domestic violence in West Africa* (2012).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> For more on upstream conflict prevent see Saferworld, *Upstream conflict prevention: addressing the root causes of conflict* (2012). For more on the difference between structural causes and triggers of conflict see Africa Peace Forum et al, *Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: a resource pack* (2004), chapter 2, p 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Op cit* DFID, p 9-10. This has also been internationally recognised in the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995), article 118, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

although there are still considerable gaps in all of these areas. By comparison, very little data is available on the prevalence of SGBV against men and boys and so the extent of the problem is unknown.<sup>8</sup> It is unhelpful that many international agreements on this issue, including UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1820 on sexual violence in armed conflict, appear to conflate SGBV with violence against women and girls. Greater attention and resources are needed to document SGBV against men and boys and better understand how to meet the specific needs of male survivors. These resources should be additional to, and not at the expense of, resources for tackling SGBV against women and girls.

- **Supporting gender-sensitive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes**
- **Promoting economic empowerment of women and other groups vulnerable to SGBV**
- **Supporting provision of legal assistance to survivors of SGBV**
- **Improving data gathering on SGBV against women, men, boys and girls**
- **Supporting women's rights and human rights organisations**

As this list highlights, preventing SGBV will require action over the long term on a large number of fronts. The UK Government therefore needs to define a realistic set of goals for what can be achieved in the course of its G8 presidency and any follow up diplomatic activities.

Saferworld would emphasise that a large number of international agreements already exist which commit governments to taking specific measures to prevent SGBV, including the Beijing Platform for Action and UNSCRs 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960. However despite making these high profile commitments, little progress has been made on implementing them. For example, although UNSCR 1325 called on states to ensure that peace agreements do not give amnesty to perpetrators of SGBV<sup>10</sup>, a study of 111 peace agreements signed since the resolution was passed in October 2000 found that only five included accountability measures for SGBV.<sup>11</sup>

Given this context, Saferworld would suggest that asking states to sign up to yet another political agreement to take action on preventing SGBV may not be the most effective possible outcome of the UK's G8 presidency. Instead, the UK should conduct a careful analysis in the run up to the G8 of why states are not doing enough to fulfil their existing commitments. This might show, for example, that better mechanisms are needed for monitoring and publicising states' progress on implementation and for holding each other accountable. Each G8 member state could then be asked commit to leading on taking specific steps to overcome these barriers to progress on particular elements of the holistic approach, such as those suggested above.

Saferworld suggests that the UK itself could consider leading on promoting gender-sensitive security and justice sector reform. Saferworld works in 17 countries across the Horn of Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East to improve

## What can the UK achieve through the G8?

The UK alone cannot solve the problem of SGBV, and Saferworld therefore welcomes the Government's decision to complement its own programming with an international diplomatic initiative to encourage other countries to play a role. While the UK's new Team of Experts will focus on increasing prosecutions for crimes of sexual violence, prosecution is only one aspect of prevention. As DFID has outlined, "a holistic approach is more likely to have greater impact: co-ordinated interventions operating at multiple levels, across sectors and over multiple timeframes are more likely to address the various aspects of, and therefore have greater impact on, tackling violence against women and girls."<sup>9</sup> Elements of such a holistic approach which the UK might encourage other governments and multilateral institutions to take up might include:

- **Changing societal norms through education and awareness-raising**
- **Introducing or reforming national legislation on SGBV**
- **Supporting gender-sensitive security and justice sector reform**
- **Providing adequate healthcare and psychosocial support for survivors**
- **Increasing women's participation in political and governance structures**
- **Ensuring accountability measures for SGBV are included in peace agreements and transitional justice mechanisms**

<sup>8</sup> Lara Stemple, 'Male Rape and Human Rights' in *Hastings Law Journal*, vol 60:605 (2009), pp 611-615.

<sup>9</sup> *Op cit* DFID, p 8.

<sup>10</sup> UN Security Council, *UN Security Council Resolution 1325* (2000), article 11. While UNSCR 1325 calls for amnesty for SGBV to be excluded from peace agreements "where feasible", UNSCR 1820 in 2008 calls for blanket exclusion.

<sup>11</sup> *Op cit* Aroussi, p 578.

national and local security and justice systems. We believe security and justice should be seen as basic services, and that they should be provided in an effective, fair and accessible manner to women, men, boys and girls. The UK is a world leader when it comes to assisting with the development of transparent, accountable and effective security and justice services overseas, and so this represents an area in which the UK has a comparative advantage.

## Security and justice: the multiplier effect

Saferworld believes that improving security and justice systems is a vital element of a holistic approach to tackling SGBV in conflict-affected countries. While the PSVI has committed to building the capacity of national governments, police and prosecutors to prosecute perpetrators of SGBV, Saferworld would strongly emphasise that while lack of capacity is often a problem, the primary barrier in conflict-affected countries is often a lack of will to understand and address communities' security needs. Indeed, in many countries, security and justice providers such as the police, armed forces and non-state security and justice providers are actually perpetrators of SGBV. Even where they are not, they often do not consider tackling SGBV to be a priority. It is therefore vital that measures are taken to ensure that state and non-state security and justice providers are made meaningfully accountable to all of the communities they are intended to serve, including women and other marginalised groups, providing a real incentive for them to be responsive to people's needs.

Saferworld believes that developing effective, accountable and gender-sensitive security and justice systems in conflict-affected and fragile countries can have a multiplier effect on preventing SGBV. Not only does it have the potential to aid prevention by giving survivors access to justice, tackling impunity and reducing the likelihood of security and justice providers themselves perpetrating SGBV, it is also an important contribution to preventing violent conflict, which is a key risk factor for SGBV.

In Saferworld's experience working in conflict-affected countries, a lack of fair access to effective, responsive security and justice services is often a key driver of conflict. The Government's cross-departmental *Building Stability Overseas Strategy* identifies security and justice programming as an important element of conflict prevention, stating that, "Support to build the capacity of security forces must be matched with efforts to build accountability, legitimacy and respect for human rights, for example through strengthening civilian

oversight of the armed forces; ensuring the proper functioning of parliaments, the media and civil society organisations; and through such measures as educating the police on dealing appropriately with sexual violence."<sup>12</sup>

In recent years, there has been an increased emphasis on the need for gender-sensitive security and justice. This means taking specific measures to promote gender equality and women's rights in all security institutions, making an effort to understand the different needs, experiences and perceptions of women, men, boys and girls and ensuring the impact of programmes and policies on each are considered at every stage of design and implementation. Integrating a gender perspective into security and justice provision is vital to ensuring that security and justice providers are effective in tackling SGBV. However despite the increased recognition of this point, and the availability of extensive guidance<sup>13</sup> on how to do it, implementation has been weak.

### **How can security and justice services be more effective in addressing SGBV?**

When reforming security and justice services to better tackle SGBV, change must be driven by those closest to the violence, who are best placed to define their security needs.

Transparency and accountability are key to this process, and it is important that survivors of SGBV should be viewed not just as victims but as agents of change who should play a central role in addressing SGBV and building peace. Security and justice programmes should:

- **be context-specific:** Security and justice programmes should be informed by detailed analysis of the particular context, assessing the needs of all stakeholders as well as looking at the conflict dynamics that exist between different groups. If analysis focuses on elites predominantly, it will often reflect male experience and tend to overlook women's needs and concerns.
- **empower women:** Recruiting women to positions where they are involved in making decisions on and delivering security and justice services can help to ensure they meet women's needs; for example, increasing numbers of female police officers seems to encourage women to report crime. Increasing the number of

<sup>12</sup> HMG, *Building Stability Overseas Strategy* (2011), p 12.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform* (2009), which is widely used and regarded as an important guide to security sector reform, includes a chapter on 'integrating gender awareness and equality'.

women in policy-making roles, such as within government and political parties, can also contribute to reducing SGBV as women may be more likely to prioritise the issue through legislation or resource allocation. But recruitment of women alone will not address discrimination and abuse; this requires specifically trained women and men. Men can also be 'gender champions'; indeed, enlisting men in senior, high profile positions to champion this issue is crucial to demonstrating that SGBV is not just a 'women's issue'.

- **balance supply with demand:** As well as looking at the institutions which provide security and justice (the 'supply' side), encouraging and empowering civil society groups and communities to become involved in the decision-making and oversight of how locally-defined solutions to their problems are delivered (the 'demand' side) considerably improves effectiveness.
- **tackle impunity:** Dealing effectively with officials from security and justice services who have themselves committed abuses, by strengthening complaints and disciplinary mechanisms and internal and external oversight. Improving professionalism and practice are vital to restoring and maintaining public trust in security and justice systems.
- **address SGBV through 'mainstream' security and justice:** Gender perspectives must be integrated throughout security and justice programming. Although there is a need for targeted initiatives to tackle SGBV, it is crucial to avoid treating gender as an issue separate from all others, thus potentially further marginalising survivors of SGBV.
- **monitor impact:** All security and justice programmes should be monitored and evaluated throughout the programme cycle for how well they address SGBV, to ensure value for money and maximum impact.
- **tackle the root causes:** security and justice reforms must be pursued as one element of a holistic process which includes measures to tackle all of the root causes of SGBV as identified in a context analysis.

It is important to note that there is a tendency in security and justice sector reform programmes for donor states which are assisting with reform to seek to replicate their own institutional structures, cultures and practices in recipient countries. Many donor states, including G8 countries, have low conviction rates for SGBV, and in some cases

SGBV is commonplace within their own security and justice systems.<sup>14</sup> Exporting the same organisational cultures and practices which perpetuate SGBV has the potential to entrench the problem in host countries, whilst also conferring international legitimacy.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore vital that states which support security and justice sector reform take stock of their own records on SGBV, work to resolve problems and take steps to ensure they are not replicated in host countries' reformed institutions. This should involve open acknowledgement of how difficult it has been to tackle SGBV in the UK and elsewhere, and sharing learning whilst not assuming that what has worked in the UK will work elsewhere.

## Conclusion

The PSVI's aim to generate increased international attention on preventing SGBV is to be welcomed, however the UK and the G8 must ensure that they are not simply reinventing the wheel. While international agreements on this issue have raised it up national policy agendas in many countries, progress on implementation has been limited. While the issue is complex, Saferworld believes that progress can be made if it is based on a sound analysis of the barriers to implementation and addresses the underlying causes of SGBV in all its forms.

### About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict. We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in 17 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and Europe.

**Saferworld** – 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT, UK  
Registered Charity no 1043843  
Company limited by guarantee no 3015948  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7324 4646 | Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647  
Email: [general@saferworld.org.uk](mailto:general@saferworld.org.uk)  
Web: [www.saferworld.org.uk](http://www.saferworld.org.uk)

<sup>14</sup> E.g. see Service Women's Action Network, *Rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military: the quick facts* (2012), [http://servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/RSASH-Quick-Facts\\_April-2012-FINAL.pdf](http://servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/RSASH-Quick-Facts_April-2012-FINAL.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Fionnuala Ni Aolain, 'Women, security, and the patriarchy of internationalised transitional justice' in *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol 31:4 (2009), p 1072.