



## BRIEFING

# Tackling gender-based violence through security and justice

## Briefing for House of Commons debate on UN Women, 10 March 2011

### Summary

The creation of UN Women represents an opportunity to ensure the international community's efforts to tackle gender-based violence (GBV) are better co-ordinated, better resourced and backed up by genuine political will. Developing transparent and accountable security and justice services (such as police, judiciary and armed forces) which are responsive to the needs of individuals and communities is vital to preventing and addressing GBV, as well as preventing armed conflict which can increase the risk of GBV occurring. Provision of security and justice services is often particularly weak in conflict, post-conflict and fragile states, where the incidence of GBV is often highest. Ensuring that women are included in decision-making on security and justice issues will be key to the success of this work.

UN Women is already working to improve security and justice services in a range of countries, but the UK Government can help by further developing and sharing the expertise it has built up over many years working to reform security and justice services overseas. It is also vital that the UK ensures that its own security and justice programmes are monitored and evaluated for their impact on GBV.

### Summary recommendations

The UK Government should:

- work with UN Women and other international partners to spread best practice and share technical expertise on reforming security and justice systems in a gender-sensitive manner, particularly in conflict-affected states
- include a plan for using security and justice programming to tackle GBV in its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security
- prioritise increasing and sharing its expertise on security and justice services in its forthcoming Building Stability Overseas Strategy
- monitor and evaluate the impact of all of its security and justice programmes on GBV
- encourage and support other countries to develop and implement their own national action plans on women, peace and security and fulfil CEDAW commitments
- make the development of effective security and justice services a key priority for the newly appointed International Violence Against Women Champion.

### Background

The term 'gender-based violence' is used to describe any act which inflicts physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering on a person on the basis of their gender or sex. Incidences of GBV may involve, but are not limited to: domestic violence, rape (including marital rape), female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation, 'honour' killings and female infanticide. GBV is both a cause and a result of gender inequality; it results from entrenched social attitudes toward the roles of men and women, but it can also reinforce inequality by preventing women and girls from accessing education, health services, employment and other means of meeting their basic needs.

While most victims/survivors of GBV are women and girls, it is important to recognise that men and boys are also subjected to GBV. For example, rape has been used against men in conflict situations as a means of undermining their masculinity in the eyes of their communities, bringing shame which relates directly to beliefs about gender. Women and girls can also perpetrate and facilitate GBV.

GBV occurs in all countries, and in many countries is endemic. Women and children are disproportionately affected in conflict and post-conflict situations where they face high risks of sexual violence and other forms of abuse. For example, 20,000–50,000 women and girls were raped during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990s. Entrenched social attitudes and gender-biased criminal justice systems mean that most victims/survivors suffer in silence with little or no recourse to justice, care or support. Moreover, the institutions which are supposed to protect citizens, such as police and armed forces, are often key perpetrators of abuse.

In 1979, the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) laid the foundation for the UN community's efforts to promote gender equality and protect women's rights. More recently, UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960 have addressed the need to protect women from GBV in conflict situations and empower women to play a greater role in matters of peace and security.

There has been increasing recognition across the international community that GBV has been massively under-addressed in development programmes. However, the head of UN Women, Michelle Bachelet, has pledged to make tackling violence against women one of the organisation's five key priorities. UN Women is also addressing GBV through its 'Women, War and Peace' workstream.

### **The role of security and justice in preventing violence**

In many countries, security and justice providers such as the police, law courts, armed forces and non-state security and justice providers such as informal and traditional justice systems (often joined by militias and private security companies, in conflict-affected and fragile states) not only fail in their duty to prevent and support victims/survivors of GBV but themselves violate and perpetuate impunity. This may be exacerbated by discriminatory laws which do not criminalise GBV as offences; prejudiced investigators who do not treat GBV seriously, or lack the appropriate skills or procedures to do so; or low reporting rates as people do not trust the police, or fear public shame or humiliation. In conflict, post-conflict and fragile states, state provision of security and justice is often particularly weak, and women's access to them particularly difficult.

It is important to recognise that women, girls, men and boys in conflict and post-conflict situations are particularly likely to experience GBV; therefore efforts to prevent and resolve conflict are a crucial component of preventing GBV. Effective security and justice sectors which are able to meet people's security needs are vital to preventing conflict, and ineffective or oppressive ones may even be drivers of insecurity themselves. **Therefore, building effective, responsive security and justice services can not only help to tackle GBV directly but also prevent conflict, thereby indirectly reducing the risk of GBV in the future.**

In recent years, there has been an increased emphasis on the need for gender-sensitive and -responsive security and justice. This means taking specific measures to promote gender equality and women's rights in all security institutions. Women, men, boys and girls experience insecurity differently in any given context and interact with security institutions and processes in different ways. Taking a gender perspective means making an effort to understand these different needs, experiences and perceptions and ensuring the impact of programmes and policies on women, men, girls and boys are considered at every stage of design and implementation.

**Integrating a gender perspective into security and justice programming can help to improve local ownership, gain the trust of civilians, increase accountability and oversight and improve compliance with international and regional laws, instruments and norms, as well as delivering more effective security and justice.** However, despite the increased recognition of the importance of gender in security and justice programming, implementation has been weak.

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

When reforming security and justice services to better tackle GBV, 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 women should be viewed not just as victims but as agents of change who should play a central role in addressing GBV and building peace. In some cases women are also the perpetrators or facilitators of GBV. In order to most effectively address GBV, 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 women in policy-making roles, such as within government and political parties, can also contribute to reducing GBV. 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 is crucial to demonstrating that GBV 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, 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 GBV 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 GBV, it is crucial to avoid treating gender as an issue separate from all others, thus potentially marginalising victims/survivors of GBV further

**monitor impact:** All security and justice programmes should be monitored and evaluated throughout the programme cycle for how well they address GBV, to ensure value for money and maximum impact

**tackle the root causes:** security and justice reforms must be accompanied by measures to improve women's economic independence and support for communities and civil society organisations in challenging the social and cultural norms which underpin much GBV - working with men and boys as well as women and girls.

## How the UK can help UN Women address GBV

UN Women is already working to help reform security and justice systems to better tackle violence against women and to ensure they take a gender perspective; for example, by improving women's access to justice through the National Police Gender Desk in Rwanda, and supporting gender-sensitive security sector reform training for police in Liberia. However, 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 there is much that it could contribute to the work of UN Women in this area.

DFID's approach to security and justice is that they should be treated as a basic service on a par with health and education, effectively recognising it as a fundamental human right. This means that everyone – without discrimination – should have access to appropriate, affordable and accountable services that protect their rights, keep their families safe, and resolve disputes fairly and promptly. Security is vital in terms of achieving sustainable peace and development.

The UK has also called a 'the market leader' in support the development of security and justice systems overseas (for instance, by the 2008 Global Conflict Prevention Pool SSR Strategy Review) and has supported numerous SSR processes, from early work with the former Warsaw Pact countries to more recent programming in the Balkans, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and West Asia. This is backed up by a network of experienced practitioners, including officials across several departments and a mix of consultants, non-governmental organisations and academics.

That is not to say there is not room for improvement in the UK's security and justice work: for example by working more closely with communities to identify their security needs; paying more attention to the 'demand side'; by ensuring that it addresses non-state security and justice providers as well as statutory ones; and by ensuring that gender perspectives are fully integrated into policy and practice across government departments and agencies, as well as the armed forces. As a leader in the field, the UK should share best practice and technical expertise on security and justice with UN Women and other international partners, in order for its knowledge and experience to have the greatest possible impact. This should be a key priority for the UK's newly appointed International Violence Against Women Champion.

The Government published a new National Action Plan (NAP) for implementing UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in November 2010, which is to be reviewed over the coming year. It contains commitments to commissioning research on security and justice and to including a section on violence against women in its security and justice training course. This should be developed into a more detailed plan for how it will use security and justice to address GBV and how it will co-ordinate its work with international partners. The UK also has an important role to play supporting others such as governments and civil society to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate their own 1325 NAPs and fully integrate and implement CEDAW commitments.

The UK Government is currently producing a cross-departmental Building Stability Overseas Strategy, which will set out its plan for addressing overseas conflict. This should include a strategy for the development of security and justice services overseas which directly addresses the need to prevent GBV and promote women's participation and representation in policy- and decision-making processes, referencing the NAP on UNSCR 1325. The Government should also ensure all of its security and justice programmes overseas are monitored and evaluated for their impact on GBV.

## **About Saferworld**

Saferworld is an independent international NGO that works to prevent violent conflict and promote co-operative approaches to security. We believe everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives free from insecurity and armed violence.

Through our work in the Horn of Africa, South and Central Asia and Eastern Europe we aim to understand what causes violence by talking to the people it affects and then bringing together communities, governments, civil society and the international community to develop solutions. Using this experience, we also work with the UK, EU, UN and others to develop ways of supporting societies address conflict and insecurity.

We always seek to work constructively with others and do not usually engage in public campaigning. While we are not a traditional development agency, we seek to understand and influence the relationship between conflict, security and international development.

We have over 60 staff based in London and abroad – with registered offices in Brussels, Juba, Kampala, Nairobi and Pristina – and a permanent staff presence in most of the countries we work in. Our funding for 2008-2009 was around £4.7million – mainly in the form of government grants from Canada, the EU, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK.

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