

Women, Peace and Security Centre Launch Event

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/william-hague-launches-new-women-peace-and-security-centre-at-lse>

Secretary Hague, Professor Calhoun, Professor Chinkin, thank you very much. Students and faculty of the London School of Economics, thank you.

It is a pleasure to be here, at your great university. You are known for many impressive qualities. But from today, you will also be known as the home to the United Kingdom's first academic centre for Women, Peace and Security. That is indeed a badge of honour. It sends a powerful message.

It is time for the empowerment of women to be the highest priority for the finest minds, in the best academic institutions. William has spoken about our campaign against sexual violence in conflict. Why, after the G8 and the United Nations Security Council, we have come to the London School of Economics.

And the specific questions we hope that you can help us answer. I want to go straight to why I think this Centre is critically important. Let me say first that the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security will belong to you, and to the students who come after you. The impact it has on the world will be down to you.

It is your Centre, and I hope it will enrich your lives and give you new opportunities. But if you were to ask me who I think this Centre is for, I picture someone who is not in this room today.

I think of a girl I met in Iraq three weeks ago. She is thirteen years old, but instead of going to school, she sits on the floor in a makeshift tent. And instead of playing with her friends, she hides inside and covers her face; because she was captured, and kept as a sex slave by ISIS, and raped repeatedly. Now she may never be able to complete her education, or get married or have a family, because in her society victims of rape are shunned, and considered shameful. Her own brother committed suicide because he could not bear the dishonour.

To my mind, what we have begun today at LSE is for that Iraqi girl and others like her. It is for all those who pay the price for the culture of impunity for crimes against women, and our collective failure to prevent conflict. But this is not a Centre that has been established simply because we value women, or because women and girls around the world deserve our support and protection.

It is being set up by a university that focuses on shaping the world, because a world without a clear path to defend and strengthen women is a world out of balance, where war, poverty and loss of life will be more common.

There is no stable future in a world in which crimes committed against women go unpunished. In which young girls are unable to reach their potential, where children see their mothers disrespected, violated and murdered.

Where it is considered acceptable for a husband to reject his wife and the mother of his children because she was raped, or normal for a woman to be forced to marry her rapist. For the security and development of our world, we have to advance the rights of women and root out violence and discrimination against them.

My challenge to you is to think of that as the ultimate purpose of this new Centre. To be a crucible of ideas that could benefit millions of girls. Million of girls for whom going to school, marrying freely and having a good job, are impossible dreams, and brutal violence a daily reality.

As students you have the opportunity to find ways to overcome problems that others before you have brushed off as simply too difficult, or simply not important. Our goal shouldn't just be to analyze those problems, it should be to find answers to them. And now is the time to do this, because there is new political will and momentum.

There are governments and leaders like William Hague stepping forward, backing the work of brave NGOs, doctors and survivors. But we need that missing piece: the next generation of educated youth with inquisitive minds, fresh energy and fight; Who are willing not only to sit in the classroom but to go into the field and the courtrooms, and to make a decisive difference.

It's often said that there isn't enough hard data on sexual violence in conflict to truly understand the problem. You can fix that. It is often said that it is impossible to end impunity for crimes that take place in warzones. Let's demolish the barriers to the gathering of evidence and the mounting of successful prosecutions. It is said there are not enough senior, skilled female leaders to take part in peace negotiations. Well let's find them and bring them together and show that there is a better model.

If the answer is for more innovation, let's bring together the best technical and creative minds, and come up with the answers. If the answer is particular action by governments, let's muster the unassailable arguments for what needs to be done. I am excited at the thought of all the students in years to come who will study at the Centre – and their ability to contribute to changing the lives of thousands if not millions of girls around the world. I am proud to be a part of this project. I look forward to working with you. And where LSE leads, I hope others will follow.

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