

Women, Peace and Security Centre Launch Event

The Rt Hon William Hague MP

Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

London School of Economics and Political Science

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

I am proud to be here to launch the historic new Centre for Women, Peace and Security at the London School of Economics. By founding this Centre LSE is setting an impressive example to other universities in the UK and around the world, and I pay tribute to Professor Calhoun, Professor Chinkin and the LSE Council for their leadership.

In a world of many different centres of influence and decision-making, in which people, ideas and technology play a vastly important role in shaping events, we need new and innovative partnerships outside government to tackle the many problems of our time.

The new LSE Centre is a powerful example of such innovative partnership, as is the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative itself.

It has involved taking a vital global issue and working with NGOs, experts, civil society and survivors in a wholly new way: not only to try to secure action by governments, but to inspire a global change in attitudes towards the use of rape as a weapon of war.

In that respect I thank my fellow campaigner and co-founder of PSVI and this Centre, Angelina Jolie Pitt, to whose ideas, vision and experience this Initiative owes so much.

I am also grateful to Professor Chinkin, who is a member of our advisory board on PSVI, and an outstanding choice to lead the UK's first academic centre for Women, Peace and Security.

I also want to thank the men and women of the Foreign Office and across government who work on these issues with immense skill and dedication, confronting extremism, countering FGM, child marriage and child pornography, and combating the trafficking of women. They represent the best values of our country, and we should be proud of the work that they do.

Above all, I want to acknowledge the survivors of rape and torture I have had the privilege of meeting – I cannot speak highly enough of their courage, dignity and integrity. Each step of our campaign has benefited from the advice and the contribution of survivors.

My personal commitment to confronting this issue arose during my 4 years as Foreign Secretary and my years as Shadow Foreign Secretary before that.

Again and again, on my visits to Sudan and to Bosnia, or when considering how to help the DRC or Somalia, or to make progress in Burma or support peace in Colombia, sexual violence in conflict arose as an issue.

It became clear to me that the cycle of rape and injustice was and is a major factor in perpetuating conflict and holding back development, but at the time it was hardly talked about by Foreign Ministers or even considered a security issue.

This is partly because it is such a painful and taboo subject, but it is also because crimes against women have been accorded a lesser priority throughout history. Sexual violence in conflict involves the deliberate targeting of women and children and men, in ways that often simply defy the power of description.

It is carried out for many different reasons: to inflict shame, humiliation and degradation, as a strategy of warfare or political oppression, as a means of reprisal and punishment or ethnic cleansing, or forcibly to displace populations. But what it certainly is not is something to simply be accepted as an inevitable feature of conflict.

The consequences for survivors are utterly horrific, severe injury and illness, rejection by their families, the inability to find or hold down a job and the loss of esteem that goes with it, and a terrible psychological burden of shame and stigma: all affecting millions of people in our lifetimes, and all rooted in the wider problem of inequality, violence and injustice faced by women around the world even outside conflict situations. Those who carry out these crimes not only devastate their victims, they destroy their place in society.

The cumulative effect of meeting survivors and learning about this issue – including from depictions of it in art, such as Angelina's film *In the Land of Blood and Honey* – led me to conclude that the United Kingdom had a responsibility to confront sexual violence in conflict in a way that had not been attempted before. When you encounter such widespread and devastating suffering you have to be prepared to consider doing things differently. Indeed, what would it say about us as a country if we knew of such injustice and did nothing about it?

Foreign policy often necessarily involves responding to the sudden eruption of crises almost on a daily basis. The world is showing every sign of signs of having entered a period of systemic instability, meaning the burden of day to day crises is going to become heavier and more complex. But despite this, we always have to strive to do something else as the United Kingdom, and that is to try to improve the condition of humanity.

In May 2012 Angelina and I began to work together on this campaign. We've taken it to the G8, to the UN Security Council, and to the UN General Assembly. Over two-thirds of the UN membership have now endorsed a Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, and last June we staged the largest summit ever held on this issue, bringing together not just governments and UN agencies but hundreds of survivors and experts from around the world and thousands of members of the public.

At each stage we have been able to break new ground – not least of all by ensuring that this subject is discussed by foreign ministers and other ministers, which I can tell you is quite a revolution.

We've set up a UK team of experts – lawyers, doctors, forensic experts, psychologists – who can be deployed into conflict areas to help gather evidence and train people to mount successful prosecutions, and are already training human rights defenders and peacekeepers in Bosnia, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and on Syria's borders. Some of you might well be future members of that team of experts. The idea is that we cannot wait until conflicts are over before seeking accountability. There has to be a credible deterrent threat during conflict itself.

To that end, we've designed the first International Protocol on how to document and investigate cases of sexual violence in conflict, we launched it at the Summit, we've translated it into many languages, and we've begun training people in its use in countries like Colombia and Nepal, and we are preparing to do the same in Iraq.

We are devising new training for peacekeepers, since men in uniform are often the first people to come into contact with victims of rape in insecure areas – and sadly in some countries they are sometimes the perpetrators of those crimes – and have begun implementing this training in our work with the forces of other nations.

But in this process, we have discovered major gaps in international understanding of how and why sexual violence occurs and how best to prevent it:

A lack of reliable statistics about warzone rape. Why rape happens in some conflicts and not in others. Why it happens at certain stages of those conflicts, and whether there is a pattern that can be predicted. How best to gather reliable and credible evidence of crimes within conflict areas, to prompt swift action or form the basis for prosecutions. What are the best ways of protecting vulnerable communities during conflict. All these questions need better answers.

This convinced us of the need for a greater academic underpinning on these issues and the most effective ways of tackling them, here in the UK, capable of working with experts in the field and universities around the world to create a critical mass of expertise and knowledge and the will to implement solutions.

I was greatly inspired in this by visiting the Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security, established with the help of Secretary Clinton.

In fact I am delighted to be able to share with you letters of support we received last night from two of the world's strongest champions of women's rights and of PSVI, Secretary of John Kerry, and Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton. And we will shortly hear a message of support from Georgetown University itself.

So this Centre will be a part of a network of people across the world, working not only to shatter impunity for sexual violence in conflict but also to advance the rights of women worldwide. There needs to be much greater focus on ending the exclusion and oppression of women in all settings, not just in conflict.

I am convinced that the suppression of women's rights is the single greatest continuing injustice in the world, perhaps the world has ever known, certainly the greatest single source of untapped potential available to humanity, and the vital missing aspect of conflict resolution worldwide.

Time and again as Foreign Secretary I took part in summits and meetings where few or no women were present, and I saw the immense difficulty the UN and international community had in living up to commitments to include women at the negotiating table when it really came down to it. We have the legal frameworks and UN resolutions we need – what we now need is their actual implementation: breaking down the barriers to women's participation.

To my mind, after 26 years as a Member of Parliament and everything I saw in 4 years as Foreign Secretary, the full social, economic and political empowerment of women is the great strategic prize of the 21st century, and this is where the UK should place its faith and its efforts.

The sweep of history is about the enlargement of freedom. It is time to ensure that that freedom finally includes all women, so that in 30 years time we are not discussing the same terrible crimes and intolerable human suffering.

So I am proud to announce that The Ministry of Defence will disburse £1 million of LIBOR funds provided by the Treasury to support the centre during its first academic year, and that the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, based in Shrivenham will also work with LSE to further the aims of the PSVI. I want to thank the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Defence Secretary, as well as the

Secretary of State for International Development who has put women and girls at the heart of the work of her department.

We will continue our campaign to end the use of rape as a weapon of war, working with the governments, individuals and institutions that have taken up this cause. But from today we will also be able to work with the UK's first academic centre on Women, Peace and Security, helping to provide the ideas and rigorous academic understanding needed to expand equal rights, equal freedom and equal opportunity – and that is an immensely heartening and inspiring development. Thank you very much.

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