

# FCDO Response

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**11 November 2020**

## **FCDO Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations on: Sexual exploitation and abuse by international peacekeepers (an accompanying report to the ICAI review of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative), September 2020**

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The Government welcomes the review by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact of HMG-led work on tackling Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) by international peacekeepers. We are grateful for its recommendations. We recognise this review is a companion to ICAI's review of the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) of January 2020, and that a broader review into SEA in the aid sector is planned for 2021. Independent scrutiny is important to ensure that our policy and programming deliver maximum impact and value for money.

The Government welcomes ICAI's finding that the UK is a leading voice in tackling SEA, both in the UN Security Council and through the UK aid programme. The UK is committed to tackling SEA and sexual harassment (SH) by peacekeeping forces and throughout the aid sector. While the focus of the ICAI review was SEA, we also include SH in our work and response, recognising it usually stems from underlying power imbalances and perpetrators may be more likely to engage in abuse or exploitation if they think sexual harassment is tolerated. This differs to the UN who often deal with SEA and SH as separate issues. As a result, some of our policies and procedures differ in scope and are specifically separated in this response for clarity.

We fully support the UN Secretary General's zero-tolerance approach to SEA in all parts of the UN. The Government's goal is to drive up SEA and SH safeguarding standards, ensuring that we all take all reasonable steps to prevent SEA and SH from occurring; listen to those who are affected; respond sensitively but robustly when harm or allegations of harm occur; and learn from every case. A new UK strategy, published in September this year, sets out what all Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending departments are doing to improve safeguarding standards internally, in partner organisations and across the whole international aid sector.

We use our position in the UN Security Council to ensure that all mandates for peacekeeping missions contain language on the protection of women and children from SEA offences and on accountability measures. The UK led on the first UN Security Council Resolution 2272 (2016) on SEA, which mandated SEA reporting and demanded that contingents guilty of persistent and widespread sexual offences be repatriated. We continue to advocate for strong SEA prevention language across

peacekeeping resolutions, and SEA prevention remains a central plank of our peacekeeping reform work.

The UK models best practice through delivering training to our own peacekeepers and police before they deploy. The UK trains thousands of peacekeepers each year from a variety of countries, including on PSVI, SEA and SH, at the British Peace Support Team in East Africa (BPST(A)). There have been no allegations of SEA committed by UK peacekeepers to date (the UN do not report on allegations of SH in the same way).

The UK actively supports the agenda of the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) on SEA at the highest level. Since 2019, the Prime Minister has been a member of the UN's Circle of Leadership on SEA, to strengthen measures to prevent SEA, to respond rapidly and decisively to credible reports of such acts, and to meet the needs of victims quickly and appropriately. Former Prime Minister Theresa May was previously a member, having joined at its launch in 2017. In 2017, we also negotiated and signed the UNSG's Voluntary Compact on SEA at the UN General Assembly, demonstrating our commitment, and mutual accountability with the UN, on preventing and addressing SEA. And in 2018 the Foreign and Development Secretaries, alongside other donors, wrote to the UNSG to call for further action to tackle SEA and SH robustly throughout the UN.

In 2018, the then Department for International Development (DFID) established a Safeguarding Unit to drive the international response to tackling SEA and SH across the aid sector, and this work continues to be a priority in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The UK hosted an international summit on SEA and SH in October 2018 where eight groups of organisations, including the UN, made commitments to improve safeguarding standards. The FCDO regularly convenes representatives of these groups to monitor progress and hold each other to account. SEA and SH are driven by power imbalances, and culture change is a key part of the response.

The HMG response to the ICAI report on SEA by international peacekeepers has been led by the FCDO, with input from the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

**Recommendation 1:** The UK government should aim for closer integration and sharing of learning between its efforts to tackle SEA in international peacekeeping and its wider work on conflict-related sexual violence.

### **Accept**

The UK takes multiple steps to ensure that projects and programme delivery are as effective as possible, and continuously attempts to identify opportunities for shared learning and collaboration.

We identified the value of shared learning through our work at NATO, by aligning our approaches to the SEA and Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) policies. In 2019/20, the UK supported, through the funding of a policy adviser, the design and development of NATO's first SEA policy. We continue to fund a policy adviser to support the implementation of NATO's SEA policy, and are also supporting the

development of NATO's CRSV policy. We are working to ensure that the lessons learned from the SEA policy are applied to the CRSV policy from the outset. For example, the successful expert workshop and technical discussion breakout groups used to seek high-level agreement to key pillars of the SEA policy prior to development will be replicated for the CRSV policy.

We do however recognise that an even closer sharing of learning on work tackling SEA in international peacekeeping and our broader work on CRSV would improve delivery and ultimately the support available to victims and survivors. We are considering ways to ensure more systematic lesson sharing to end SEA in international peacekeeping, and improved learning will support this.

We are using the merger of the former DFID and Foreign and Commonwealth Office to work strategically across the new department, along with MOD, in order to plan our future engagement on this vital issue. Uniting development and diplomacy in one department brings together Britain's international effort to have even greater impact and influence on the world stage. We will take into account ICAI's recommendations on the value of closer integration between SEA in international peacekeeping and CRSV policies. We will also seek to make links with our work to prevent SEA and SH in the aid sector, and our work to prevent all forms of gender-based violence in conflict and non-conflict settings, recognising the broader work we are doing to address common drivers and root causes.

**Recommendation 2:** The UK government should ensure that efforts to improve discipline among peacekeeping personnel are balanced with measures to promote the interests and welfare of survivors.

### **Accept**

The UK Government is committed to ensuring that the interests and welfare of survivors are paramount. The UK's commitment to a victim-led approach to remedial action is underlined by our funding of over £4.5 million since 2016 to support the UNSG's efforts to tackle SEA.

We have supported the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate (OVRA) to deliver a mapping exercise of the available local capacities in 13 countries to assist and support victims of SEA. We have also supported OVRA in developing a Victims' Rights Statement, which will outline a common understanding of victims' rights and a survivor/victim-centred approach in preventing and responding to SEA.

FCDO's broader approach to safeguarding against SEA and SH also has support to victims and survivors at the forefront. It is a core element of the commitments made at the 2018 Safeguarding Summit, and of the new UK Strategy on SEA and SH Safeguarding published in September this year. FCDO are exploring options for a new stream of work to tackle some of the most significant challenges and barriers that survivors face. Therefore, although the Safeguarding Unit's work has a wider focus than peacekeeping, much of it has a real impact on the peacekeeping sector.

We also ensure that all training delivered by the BPST(A) covers SEA and SH. In Financial Year 2019/20, BPST(A) delivered modules on SEA and SH to around 2700

individuals across 34 different training events, increasing awareness of preventative action and how best to support victims and survivors.

We acknowledge that there is always more that the UK can do to support survivors of SEA and SH, and we will continue to work with our partners, including OVRA, civil society, beneficiaries, and survivors to make improvements. A key challenge is that many survivors will not necessarily identify themselves as such, making it difficult to establish the exact breadth of support required for referral to services. Victims and survivors may access support through local/national service provision as well as through the UN system in emergency situations and broader service provision, including those directed specifically to conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence, and to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Support may also be accessed through the FCDO's broader violence against women and girls programming.

As part of our commitment to a survivor-centred approach, we will continue regularly to review and improve our design processes for all SEA and SH-related programming, whether in the international aid sector or the international peacekeeping response, to ensure that they are inclusive and effective, and to share information and learning.