



# Foreign & Commonwealth Office

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**Minister of State**

1 July 2014

## **Burma: Sexual violence**

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received a large number of e-mails and letters in recent weeks about sexual violence in Burma. As Minister responsible for our relations with Burma, I share your concerns, and I would like to update you on the action the British Government is taking to address this issue.

Sexual violence in conflict destroys lives and damages communities, and this is why the British Government launched the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative in May 2012, followed in September 2013 by the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. The Declaration has now been endorsed by over 150 countries, creating a powerful symbol of international will to address this issue.

On 12 June the Foreign Secretary William Hague, Secretary of State for Defence Philip Hammond, and Secretary of State for International Development Justine Greening launched the British Government's third [National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security](#). This sets out our ambition to put women and girls at the centre of all efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, to promote peace and stability, and to prevent and respond to violence. Six priority countries have been identified, including Burma; we are developing an implementation plan, which will be made available to the public later this year.

We are currently funding £300,000 towards projects in Burma to provide greater support to, and protection for, survivors of sexual violence. One of these projects is training women in basic legal skills to improve access to justice for women survivors and developing mechanisms in the community to prevent and respond to acts of sexual violence. This project is benefiting women and girls in Kachin, Kayah and Rakhine States, Meiktila in Mandalay Division, and Pyapon in Irrawaddy Division. We are sponsoring workshops and psychosocial training in 40 villages, to help leaders prevent sexual violence in their own communities. In addition, we are funding work with non-state armed groups to promote adherence to international standards in respect of sexual violence and gender discrimination. Through international non-governmental organisations, the UK also gives support to legal assistance centres in Burmese refugee camps in Thailand and to trauma care in camps in Kachin State, both of which deal with rape cases. We are working closely with the UN in Rakhine State to strengthen work to prevent and respond to sexual violence. We will continue to look for further opportunities to incorporate sexual violence prevention and protection for survivors into our work in Burma.

During my most recent visit to Burma in January, I raised the issue of sexual violence with senior members of the Burmese government and military – including the Commander in Chief of the armed forces, and urged the government to endorse the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. [My speech in January at the British Council in Rangoon](#) made clear the many concerns we continue to have about sexual violence and other human rights issues. In April, the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, spoke to the Burmese Foreign Minister, U Wunna Maung Lwin, about the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence.

We welcomed the Burmese government's endorsement of the Declaration on 5 June and the attendance of Deputy Foreign Minister U Thant Kyaw at the Global Summit from 10 to 13 June. This was a welcome first step towards recognising and addressing the problem of sexual violence in Burma. We are encouraging the government to follow up its commitment with concrete action. Strengthening legislation to ensure that those responsible for these terrible crimes are held accountable for their actions and improving access to services and justice for survivors are the priorities. The British Government remains ready to support this process.

In parallel to the Summit, the British Embassy in Rangoon hosted several events including a Youth Event with a balloon release in honour of survivors, and a Technical Experts Panel Discussion with UN agencies, NGOs and the diplomatic community. Together with BBC Media Action we facilitated a roundtable discussion broadcast across the country to over three million listeners. A diverse range of Burmese people from activists to celebrities gave their support to the campaign in a video; this can be watched on the [Embassy's Facebook page](#).

On 8 April, the British Government published [UK Activities in Burma](#) – a document which sets out for the first time the range of work in Burma being undertaken by the Foreign Office, Department for International Development, Ministry of Defence and UK Trade and Investment. If you require any further information, please consult the [UK and Burma website](#), follow us on [Facebook](#) or Twitter: [@UKinBurma](#).

Thank you for your support in highlighting these issues in Burma. Human rights will remain at the heart of British policy. We will remain a vocal advocate for change in Burma and continue to press for action to resolve what are issues of real concern.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hugo Swire'.

**THE RT HON HUGO SWIRE MP**  
**Minister of State**