

Cross Region

Type:	Debate
Date of Proceeding:	26.10.2009
Reference:	713 c1068-9
Member:	Hannay of Chiswick, Lord
Title:	Coroners and Justice Bill
Description:	<p>My Lords, I am sorry to disagree with the noble Lord, but I have a couple of questions that I want to put to the Government and it looks as though I would not be in a good position to do so if the Minister spoke now. I therefore hope that the House will allow me a couple of minutes to put the questions. I am sure that we will then have the debate that the noble Lord wants.</p> <p>Speaking in support of the noble Lord, Lord Carlile, and my noble friend Lady D’Souza, we are grateful to the Government for their initial move in Committee to make these crimes retrospectively recognisable under British law. They are now recognised from 1991, which catches a considerable number of potential criminals in Serbia, the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. We are also grateful for all the work that the Minister, his colleagues and officials undertook in trying to meet our points. However, I still believe that presence minus would have produced a cleaner, clearer outcome than residence plus. The effort that the Government have made in Amendment 65B is acceptable, but it is more complicated by going down the presence minus route. To some extent, it amounts to the approach of the Red Queen saying, "Residence is residence because I say it’s residence".</p> <p>Nevertheless, I shall not look that gift horse in the mouth and would like to ask three questions. First, much of the interest in this subject was triggered by the Rwandans who the Government tried to deport back to Rwanda, where they would have stood trial, and who the Court of Appeal, quite correctly in my view—it is not my job to say so, but nevertheless—decided would not get a fair trial in Rwanda. It then turned out that they could not get a trial anywhere and they got off. I would therefore like to know whether subsection (1)(g) in new Section 67A in his amendment would, if it had been in force at the time when that occurred, have caught that sort of person.</p> <p>Secondly, subsection (1)(c) of the new section refers to, ""an individual who has leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom for the purposes of work or study and who is in the United Kingdom".</p>

	<p>Can the Minister throw light on whether that covers those who come here for military training or courses? It sounds as though it does, because military training and courses are study, but I would like to hear that from the Minister. Of course, in certain countries, the military are only too likely to be those who are capable of committing, and in some cases have committed, such crimes.</p> <p>Thirdly, can the Minister throw light on the impact of these fairly complex provisions on people who get long-term business visas, often for six months? Would they be caught if they fell within the scope of the categories that are applied?</p> <p>I repeat that the Government have made a fair try of closing a loophole that should never have existed. We do not want in this House to go into how it came about in the first place, but I am sure that we do not want it to be there. Moving away from it is highly desirable. The more toughly and clearly we move away from it, the less these people will come to this country. Therefore, the problem that the Government see of an excessive demand on resources is self-solving: the tougher we are, the less they will come. The clearer we are that the culture of impunity will not be tolerated by this country, the more we will help the worldwide cause of preventing these appalling crimes.</p>
Proceeding:	<u>80418</u>
Legislature:	House of Lords (HoL)
Place:	Lords Chamber
Session:	08-09
Type:	Debate
Date of Proceeding:	19.11.2009
Reference:	715 c54-6
Member:	Jay of Ewelme, Lord
Title:	Queen's Speech
Description:	<p>My Lords, I start by echoing the tribute made by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Bramall, to our Armed Forces in Afghanistan. In particular, I pay tribute to the role played by our helicopter pilots and crews and those who support them. I do that for two reasons. First, the joint helicopter base at RAF Benson is just down the road from Ewelme, and I know well the sacrifices that they have made in Iraq and are making in Afghanistan. Secondly, when there is so much focus on the helicopters that we do not have, it is good to remember the bravery, sacrifice and professionalism of those who operate the helicopters that we have.</p> <p>However, I focus today more on how we prevent future conflicts, conflicts which cause great humanitarian crises,</p>

damage our interests and may draw our Armed Forces into bitter and difficult wars. It is, alas, only too easy to see where tomorrow's risks and conflicts may lie, conflicts which would inevitably draw in the international community and whichever Government are in power in the United Kingdom at the time. I shall briefly mention three—Sudan, the Democratic Republic of [Congo](#) and Liberia—all of which I have visited in the past couple of years as chair of the medical aid charity Merlin, an interest which I declare today.

First, I turn to Sudan. There is, rightly, a strong focus on Darfur, where the humanitarian crisis is acute, but there is an equal if not greater danger that in the referendum planned for 2011 under the terms of the comprehensive peace agreement between the north and the south, the south decides to secede, the north resists and a further bloody war breaks out. That is a really frightening prospect.

Conflict in the Democratic Republic of [Congo](#) is now focused in the east, in North Kivu province around Goma. Despite the largest UN peacekeeping force in the world today, recent fighting there has seen 1,000 civilians killed, 7,000 women raped and more than 1 million people displaced; and the prospects are not encouraging. I greatly look forward to the forthcoming speech from the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester, which I hope will touch on the Democratic Republic of [Congo](#).

I turn, finally, to Liberia. Liberia has a functioning democracy with an impressive President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. However, the economy and political system are fragile after 14 years of vicious civil war and the prospects for the elections in two years' time are uncertain. Guinea, to the north, is volatile. If that volatility should spread to Liberia, the impact on Sierra Leone, to the west, where we have invested huge amounts over the years, could be disastrous.

So how can we prevent conflicts in these and other areas in the future? My first suggestion, which I have made before—and to which I know the Minister, the noble Baroness, Lady Kinnock, is sympathetic—is to urge the Government to work to make the UN doctrine of responsibility to protect a reality and not just an aspiration. Behind the jargon "responsibility to protect" is a UN principle of huge importance: a pledge by world leaders to protect their populations from genocide, from ethnic cleansing and from crimes against humanity, and to give the rest of us the responsibility to ensure that they do just that. It is of course controversial. It is seen by some as an undue interference in the domestic affairs of others and even as a justification for military adventures. However, as the UN Secretary-General himself

recognises, it is not that. It is a doctrine which, if widely accepted, could improve governance in some pretty dire states by putting pressure on leaders to abide by proper standards and by giving the international community as a whole the means to exert such pressure. Had it been in operation, the genocide in [Rwanda](#), the conflict in Darfur and in Sierra Leone and the civil war in Liberia might at the least have been less likely.

The UN resolution adopted by consensus at the General Assembly in July was a modest step forward. May I encourage the Government to work with others—in particular the United States; Canada, whose idea it was; the EU and likeminded developing countries—to strengthen the doctrine so that it can play a real role in preventing future conflicts? This is an idea whose time must come.

Secondly, and moving from what is now still a theory to what is very much practice, I urge the Government, and any future Government, to ensure that Britain continues to play, and indeed increases, the active role it plays in present and future conflict prevention and resolution activities. This means supporting the UN in its peacekeeping activities. On one specific point, I urge the Government, when the mandate for the UN peacekeeping force in the Democratic Republic of [Congo](#) comes up for renewal next month, to work to extend it to cover peacebuilding as well as peacemaking and to work with the African Union to strengthen the capacity of the [Congolese](#) army to prevent future atrocities in that benighted country.

It also means working with the European Union, now that the Lisbon treaty has been ratified, and in particular with the new high representative, whoever may be chosen this evening, to put conflict prevention and resolution high on the EU foreign policy agenda—with, I would suggest, Somalia and the Horn of Africa, Sudan and the Great Lakes as priorities. This does not mean limiting our horizons to the EU but using our influence in the EU to further our interests elsewhere. As the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, said a moment or two ago, we must have the self-confidence to recognise and to act on that. I believe very strongly that that is in Britain's interest, it is in Europe's interest, and it would be greatly welcomed by the United States.

Finally, I urge the Government once again, as many of your Lordships have in recent months, to recognise that cuts in our conflict prevention budget are hugely short-sighted. I know the budgetary pressures. I know that there have to be priorities and savings. However, to cut small sums now that can prevent the expenditure of large sums later if conflict does, alas, break out, makes no sense at all. Surely that must be a point that all government departments, including the Treasury, recognise as

common sense. But that is what we are now doing, alas—wrongly, in my view—in Liberia. The Government must find a way at least to prevent the erosion of our peacekeeping budget from the depreciation of the pound, which has a completely arbitrary effect on the activities that we need to carry out to prevent conflicts in the future.

I hope that the strategic defence review that will take place next year whichever Government are in power will ensure enough capacity in our force structure to enable Britain to play a major role in conflict prevention and resolution in the years ahead. This is an area of great strength for this country thanks to the professionalism and reputation of our Armed Forces, and we must capitalise on that. It would be good to have an assurance to that effect from both Front Benches at the end of this debate.

Proceeding: 81107

Legislature: House of Lords (HoL)

Place: Lords Chamber

Session: 09-10

Type:	Debate
Date of Proceeding:	04.11.2009
Reference:	714 c323-5
Member:	Roberts of Llandudno, Lord
Title:	Immigration: Detention and Deportation
Description:	<p>My Lords, about seven weeks ago when I was flying from Pittsburgh to Chicago, I sat next to a very staunch Republican. What he thought of President Obama could not be repeated in this Chamber. He thought the healthcare proposals were totally not required. They only affected, he said, 36 million "illegals". We are on dangerous ground if we take the attitude that people can be disregarded and pushed to one side because they are different from us. They are only asylum seekers, they are only refugees, they might only be migrants—but they are people, and people are people whatever their background. Whatever their situation, they are people who should be respected and treated—especially if they are children—with compassion and love. When we treat them in such a way that their life becomes intolerable and harsh, we are creating a tremendous bomb that could explode in the future and affect every one of us. Wherever people are from, whatever their background, whatever their situation, they should be treated with respect and as though they have tremendous potential and a great deal to give.</p> <p>A little while ago the Watoto children's choir was singing in the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft, and it was a tremendous concert. At the end, the children, who ranged from six to 13 years of age, were asked what they would like to be when they grow up. One said, "I want to be an airline pilot"; another said, "I want to be a lawyer". A little lad of 10 said, "I want to be President of Uganda". Children have dreams and, whatever their situation, they need to be nurtured in such a way that there is a possibility that those dreams, in time, will be realised.</p> <p>The Refugee Council has done a tremendous amount of work, which I welcome. The council is opposed to the detention of asylum seekers and believes that the current use of detention during and at the end of the asylum process is disproportionate and unnecessary. As has already been mentioned, it is wrong that there is no time limit on how long an asylum seeker can be detained and that administrative detention on such a scale can happen without scrutiny by an independent body. I hope the Minister will be able to comment on that.</p> <p>I have already mentioned my unhappiness at the detention of children: I believe that children should never be detained. Would we ever subject our own children to the conditions and the hopelessness that we allow other people's children— asylum seekers' children—to be subjected to? It is alleged that in Yarl's</p>

Wood—the Minister may say that my figure is not correct—83 children last year were detained for 28 days or more. That is horrific. The Children’s Commissioner for England said: ""The UK should not be detaining any child who has had an unsuccessful asylum claim . Not only is there no reason to continue the administrative detention of children, we present evidence in this report to demonstrate that it may be harmful to their health and well-being" ."

The commissioner went on to outline a range of concerns about the experiences of children during detention and removal, such as their feelings of loss and anxiety. Imagine a little child whose whole life is dark and hopeless, and then consider that we are adding to that through their detention in our centres. The commissioner says that there is a lack of counselling and emotional support and that there are issues related to healthcare.

When the UKBA revises the fast-track process, I hope that it will look at the evidence of the past two years. A promise has been given that it will be revised; when will that happen?

Those who suffer particularly when they are detained include youngsters whose age is in dispute: they are asked, "Are you an adult?" "Are you a child?" Pregnant women, survivors of torture, people with serious health problems and those whose removal from the UK is not imminent continue to be detained. Here I pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Avebury—unfortunately he is in hospital—who has led the way on many of these concerns over the past few years.

We are concerned that when people are detained they cannot access legal representation or exercise their right to apply for bail to be let out of detention. In some circumstances this can lead to prolonged periods of detention which, as has already been mentioned, are never subject to external scrutiny. The latest snapshot figure for detention shows that 225 people have been detained for one year. This is unacceptable. Detention should be used only as an exceptional measure at the end of the asylum process, and for a limited time in order to effect removal.

There have been repeated reports by Her Majesty’s Inspector of Prisons which highlight inadequate welfare arrangements and a systematic failure to deal with concerns about detention. We are concerned about the ending of the country policies which gave a list of acceptable countries to which people could be returned. That has gone and now there are returns to countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka where such returns are not sustainable. About a year ago I invited the Minister to come with me to Heathrow Airport, where the first

	<p>deportations to Zimbabwe were to take place. That time has gone but I still invite him to share the concern of these ordinary people whose lives are among the most vulnerable.</p> <p>I thank the noble Lord, Lord Hylton, for introducing the debate. He is one of the great standard bearers for this issue in this House. We need constantly to monitor our immigration and asylum procedures.</p>
Proceeding:	<u>80697</u>
Legislature:	House of Lords (HoL)
Place:	Lords Chamber
Session:	08-09
Type:	Debate
Date of Proceeding:	04.11.2009
Reference:	714 c323-5
Member:	Roberts of Llandudno, Lord
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Proceeding:	<u>80697</u>
Legislature:	House of Lords (HoL)
Place:	Lords Chamber
Session:	08-09
Type:	Debate
Date of Proceeding:	11.11.2009
Reference:	499 c129-32WH
Member:	Thomas, Gareth (Harrow West)
Title:	Female Mortality (Africa)
Description:	<p>Let me, in the usual way, congratulate the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) on securing the debate. I share the concerns that he raised and welcome his interest. I join him in acknowledging the important work of the all-party group on population. I was interested in his description of eRanger, particularly as it is a social enterprise, and as the vehicles it facilitates the building of are delivered through a co-operative. As chair of the Co-operative party and a Co-operative MP, I have a particular ideological interest in the business model he is promoting. He asked several questions and asked for a number of assurances, which I shall come to. I shall respond initially by giving some context to the debate.</p> <p>As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, female mortality is a critical development issue: it is central to three of the millennium development goals, which the international community and the British Government are striving to support the achievement of.</p>

In many countries, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is slowing, but it is still the leading cause of death for women in Africa. We know that it is young girls who are disproportionately affected, because they have little control over key aspects of their lives, including sexual behaviour, schooling and access to health care, and little ability to mitigate the impacts of the epidemic on other aspects of their lives.

In sub-Saharan Africa, 250,000 women die each year from pregnancy-related complications. In some countries, the figure is much higher. Almost half the maternal deaths occur in just four countries: Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Tanzania. Sierra Leone has one of the highest reported rates; indeed, a woman in Sierra Leone has a one in eight chance of dying due to pregnancy, so the information that the hon. Gentleman provided about the deployment of eRanger vehicles to Sierra Leone gives a further sign of encouragement for us to take from the debate. The other countries with high reported rates are Rwanda, Malawi and Nigeria. In Africa, many women die due to their unequal access and outcomes, based on class, custom, wealth and power. In Nigeria and Malawi, over 70 per cent. of women say that their husbands alone make the decisions regarding their health care—a terrifying statistic that demonstrates the low status of women in some communities.

One strategically encouraging sign has been the commitment—finally—of the United Nations to establishing a gender agency, for the first time bringing together disparate parts of the UN community to create a much more powerful agency, with a high-ranking leader within the UN system. I hope that that will raise the profile of women and give voice to the many women who, as the hon. Gentleman will recognise, are not heard at the moment in the communities in which they live.

The hon. Gentleman knows that it is difficult to measure maternal mortality accurately. While there seems to have been considerable progress in some countries—we can take heart from the example of Zambia—overall, as he rightly says, there has been negligible progress. Skilled attendance at birth is easier to measure. That means of measuring progress in getting support to women is a core component of a strategy to reduce maternal deaths that we are deploying, and which other donors are getting behind. However, that measurement is not always reliable or consistent. Skilled attendance at birth is very low in most of sub-Saharan Africa, reflecting the higher rates of maternal mortality. For example, in Ethiopia only 28 per cent. of pregnant women receive pre-natal care and only 6 per cent. of births are attended by skilled health staff. That gives some indication of the scale of the challenge that the hon. Gentleman rightly alluded to, and which we recognise.

Our efforts are focused on trying to reduce child mortality and, of course, maternal mortality, but also on reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS as part of the overall drive to reduce female mortality. There has been some progress. The average life expectancy of women in Africa, despite the AIDS epidemic, is slowly increasing and now stands at 54 years. There has been a 20 per cent. reduction in child mortality since 1990, but a girl in Africa is still 25 times more likely to die before her fifth birthday than a girl born in the UK.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that while there has been progress in some areas, maternal mortality levels remain unacceptably high and progress seems to have stalled. In many countries, as in the UK a century ago, there is still an acceptance that women will die in childbirth. That is compounded by the low social status of women in parts of Africa and by a lack of access to services.

As the hon. Gentleman suggested, a series of key interventions can be made to make a real difference to women's survival rates. Family planning and access to safe abortion services are crucial examples, as both are often stigmatised, poorly resourced and, in the case of abortion, illegal in some countries.

Sadly, the truth is that there has been inadequate investment in health systems in general and in maternal health in particular for far too long. For an individual family it might be very costly to access care, and the result is that women are left to die at home. Caring for a woman through pregnancy and delivery requires health services that work, with trained and equipped staff. We know that there is a massive shortage of health workers across the continent, and many health systems are so weak that they offer little or no effective care, particularly in critical areas such as family planning, safe abortion and, crucially, obstetric care. The unmet demand for family planning, for example, results in one third of maternal deaths, including the 13 per cent. from unsafe abortion.

I will give a more graphic example of the differences between Africa and Europe and Asia: while over half of sexually active couples in Europe and Asia use contraception, the average prevalence of contraception across the continent of Africa is only 20 per cent. In many countries, particularly in west and central Africa, rates are less than 5 per cent. Access to contraceptives is probably the most cost-effective way of reducing maternal mortality.

The hon. Gentleman and others may well ask what we are doing about such a grim picture. As he said, we have a strategy on

maternal mortality and reproductive health, and it is being updated with an evidence paper to help guide our future work and that of other donors. Politically, we are beginning to see an unprecedented international interest in maternal mortality, partly driven by the White Ribbon Alliance, which has been championed by the Prime Minister's wife, Sarah Brown, and is beginning to catalyse the support of women across the globe and, in particular, the support of African leaders.

The UK has tried to support that process by leading efforts with international partners to develop a broad-based, global consensus for maternal, new-born and child health. That consensus sets out a framework for action, hopefully aligning political will alongside advocacy and finance, behind a set of five agreed policies and priority interventions to try to save the lives of women and children. The financing issues to put those interventions in place are being addressed.

The hon. Gentleman may remember that the high-level taskforce on innovative international financing for health systems, jointly led by the Prime Minister, hosted an event at the UN General Assembly in September, where more than £3 billion was announced to strengthen health systems in developing countries. Leaders from Malawi, Ghana, Liberia, **Burundi** and Sierra Leone announced expanded access to free health care, which in the long term will result in millions of children and pregnant women gaining access to essential services.

As for my Department's financing, 15 per cent. of UK development aid goes to health. The UK has committed itself to investing some £6 billion to strengthen health systems until 2015. Much of that money goes to supporting and strengthening general health services. For example, in Ethiopia we have committed some £25 million over four years to increase the number of community health workers tenfold. With our support, access to contraceptives has already increased from just over 20 per cent. to just over 51 per cent. Our support to the health sector in Malawi has contributed to an increase in skilled birth attendance from just under 40 per cent. to some 45 per cent. in 2007-08.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a number of international organisations, including UNICEF, which does vital work. We help to fund work of UNICEF, the World Health Organisation and UNFPA, which also works in that area.

The hon. Gentleman made a specific plea for further engagement with eRanger, the organisation and social enterprise in his constituency. I am aware that a series of motorcycle and bicycle ambulance schemes are making a real difference. I have

	<p>seen them in action in Nepal, where they are clearly helping to save lives. I am aware also of the DFID programmes that support eRanger programmes in Malawi and Kenya. The hon. Gentleman asked me to ensure that eRanger sees a copy of the strategy; I am happy to give him that assurance. I would be happy also to follow the example of the Under-Secretary of State for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster), who met the hon. Gentleman and eRanger; if necessary, I shall meet them again. I shall certainly write to the hon. Gentleman with a contact for eRanger to use; in turn, I hope that that will help eRanger to gain access to the relevant person at the DFID office in-country.</p> <p>I cannot guarantee that eRanger will always be the contracted organisation. We have to allow the developing countries concerned to take those procurement decisions for themselves. However, I would want social enterprises and co-operatives to have access to the information that will enable them to make their pitch.</p>
Proceeding:	<u>80916</u>
Legislature:	House of Commons (HoC)
Place:	Westminster Hall
Session:	08-09
Notes:	

Type:	Debate
Date of Proceeding:	19.11.2009
Reference:	715 c56-9
Member:	Winchester, Bishop
Title:	Queen's Speech
Description:	<p>My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Lord. This summer in Kindu in the province of Maniema in Congo I had the privilege, with my wife and the Congolese Anglican Bishop of Kindu, of spending an hour or more at Merlin's headquarters in Kindu, Merlin delivering medical services, effectively for the province of Maniema, in immensely complex conditions.</p> <p>A hundred years ago today there was an enormous demonstration at the Albert Hall, with people queuing all around the block and the Albert Hall standing room only, chaired and organised by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, around what was then seen as the moral outrage of the situation in Congo. Today the Archbishop of Canterbury and my other friend, the Anglican Archbishop in Congo, Archbishop Isingoma, have published a statement about the whole situation. There was a celebration and a reiteration of that demonstration at the Albert Hall this morning, at which I had the privilege of</p>

speaking. My apologies, therefore, to the Minister and to noble Lords for missing the first four minutes of her speech.

In the terms of the Archbishop of Canterbury of a hundred years ago, the real hideous outrage is that the situation is today as it is, and not only in the east of the country—statistics on which have just been well given by the noble Lord. The **LRA** is rampant in the north-east—there have been hideous outrages both at Christmas and ever since—and in southern Sudan and in the Central African Republic. Even recently there has been a fresh outbreak of conflict in western/north-western **Congo**, with 21,000 refugees fleeing into the northern parts of **Congo-Brazzaville**—another hideous state, by the way—in recent weeks.

Today's demonstration at the Albert Hall was particularly concerned with the levels of rape in **Congo**. The levels of sexual violence are appalling. To put it baldly, where you see the words "sexual violence" alongside "rape" it means the things that are done to women in addition to rape, with the ends of guns, with bayonets, with sticks and so on. At one meeting of 200 to 250 members of the Mothers' Union in Kindu in the summer, many of the ladies had walked 200 kilometres to meet their bishop's wife, their bishop, my wife and me. There was a second meeting after the first and after the lunch where those who had been themselves raped joined together to talk further with my wife and the bishop's wife. Some 50 of those 200 to 250 women came to that meeting as having themselves suffered rape and sexual violence. Kindu, as the noble Lord will know well, is not at the heart of the war area by any means. The situation there, in that respect as in so much else, is appalling.

As for the outcome of the transitional process, the elections of 2006 and huge inputs of British and other aid, the **Congolese** Government are achieving little or nothing. Outside Kinshasa they are achieving a considerable reign of terror over anyone who shows any signs of opposing them. Corruption is pervasive. As a result of that pervasive corruption, as the noble Lord has again noted, the situation in the national army is utterly deplorable. It is, as armies are in so many other parts of the world, as dangerous as the rebels to local people. It is deeply and widely engaged in the management of the pillage of minerals and the making of money for that purpose. It is colluding with those with whom it is fighting; they are letting each other's vehicles through checkpoints when they are full of minerals or ammunition, as Global Witness has recently publicised. There is a fearful level of impunity at every level for those who are committing human rights offences. There is almost everything to be done in the way of security sector reform. Churches and local NGOs, supported by external NGOs,

are unanimous and clear that the present war in eastern Congo, called Kimya II, is a humanitarian disaster. It has recently been described by the protection cluster of Congolese NGOs as a massive, desperate scale of humanitarian fallout of the ongoing military operations through 2009.

I have talked to Roman Catholic and Anglican church leaders in Congo. There is a real danger that Her Majesty's Government's continuing, though qualified, support for that war, alongside that of MONUC, is rapidly leading those most active in protecting the rights of local people to lose confidence in them and other western Governments. I think that extremely few of the 3,000 reinforcements for MONUC promised in October last year are yet in theatre. There is an acute shortage of helicopters and boats in a place where road travel anywhere more than about 10 miles outside any major centre is appallingly difficult, as I know to the cost of my rattled bones. It is important that other ways are found of bringing peace, other than that war.

As far as the needs of the country are concerned, I have already mentioned security sector reform. Although work is being done by DfID and the Chinese on the infrastructure, there is a huge amount to be done. There is no climate for economic activity. As you fly into Beni, Butembo or Goma, you see an alarming number of new houses being built, but my information from Congolese sources and from Her Majesty's embassy is that next to none of those new houses is based on anything other than corrupt money, the pillage of minerals and the import of arms. That is very serious.

We have enormous responsibility. Her Majesty's Government and their European and American partners are the major donors to the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda. I believe that our Government need to give real sustained attention to the range of places that the noble Lord mentioned, among them the DRC and the Great Lakes region. It was not encouraging that for more than two months in the summer there was no Minister for Africa. We regret the loss of the noble Lord, Lord Malloch-Brown, although we welcome the coming of the noble Baroness, but it would be good if there were a Minister for Africa. If we asked the noble Baroness to reiterate the range of her responsibilities later today, she would not have much time to say anything else because the Minister for Africa is responsible for a great deal else as well.

In the NGO community, both Congolese and expatriate, including bodies such as Human Rights Watch, Global Witness and a host of others, there is a strong sense that there is a crying need for British, European and American diplomacy to get on the front foot and be more active and incisive. There is a strong

	<p>sense around in that community that Western diplomacy has become limp-wristed in Congo and that there is a need for pressured and clear talk to Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC Government, awash as it is with Chinese and Indian money. We cannot make peace with the continuing war. Peace negotiations must include minerals, weapons and mines if the people are not to be abused further. There is a need for energetic action to find out who is making the money, who is taking out the minerals and where they are going. The British Government, like other European Governments, have been very slow around the OECD guidelines to pursue British and European companies. In the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Europe and America there are people running the wars and the pillage. We have to bring all that to book if there is to be some possibility of peace in the land. I hope that we will see a fresh concentration of effort on this region and others by the present Government and by any Government who succeed them because 100 years is a long time and the situation has been appalling all that time.</p> <p>Many of us on these Benches and elsewhere were very concerned about and, indeed, opposed the 2003 Iraq war because we felt that it would lead to a leaching away of attention and money from places such as the Great Lakes region. I believe we have seen that over the past six years, and we must redress the balance, whatever the seriousness of events in Afghanistan and Pakistan.</p>
Proceeding:	81107
Legislature:	House of Lords (HoL)
Place:	Lords Chamber
Session:	09-10

Type:	Debate
Date of Proceeding:	19.11.2009
Reference:	715 c75-9
Member:	Chidgey, Lord
Title:	Queen's Speech
Description:	<p>My Lords, I am, as always, delighted to follow the noble Earl in this debate, particularly his final theme of issues in Africa. Significant aspects of the UK's foreign policy are to some degree influenced by the state of affairs on the African continent. It is worth looking at whether DfID and the FCO's resources, in particular, are being effectively deployed in those areas. I declare my interests as vice-chair of the All-Party Group on Africa, a council member for AWEPA—European Parliamentarians for Africa— and the chair of the advisory board of the Commonwealth parliamentary studies unit.</p>

Looking at key developments in Africa over the past few years, such as the advent of the NePAD initiative that also developed the African peer review mechanism, it is clear that that peer review, which was devised and overseen by the African Union, has yet to be established root and branch. Countries that have volunteered for peer review have tended to be from the traditionally democratic African states. There is therefore a view, particularly among African nations, that it has become something of a toothless exercise, much like the SADC review of Zimbabwe that has failed to influence the behaviour of President Mugabe in any strong way.

I will come back to NePAD later. I will now talk a little about progress towards meeting the millennium development goals. Senior African politicians are now very objective in their assessment of the effectiveness of, and progress with, the MDGs. For example, Graça Machel, the former Prime Minister of Mozambique, speaking in Cape Town just last month, pointed out that the international financial crisis and global recession has impacted more severely on Africa than on other parts of the world, not least because some donor countries have cut their funding targets in response. I note our Government's commitment not to do that and to reach the 0.7 per cent of GDP target.

It is also unrealistic to think that all 53 countries in Africa will reach the MDGs on time. African politicians are determined that the failure of some countries should not be seen as the failure of the continent. Through the peer-review mechanism, they note that many Parliaments are struggling. Parliaments in Africa are under-resourced and unable to hold their Executives to account. They need support to develop monitoring capacity over national resources. They need, as Mrs Machel puts it, "to be more assertive" over the distribution of their national resources by their Executives. Mrs Machel begs the question: how many African countries are now allocating 10 per cent of their resources to agriculture? How many are now allocating 15 per cent to health, as promised in the MDGs? It is clear that the MDG target of halving the number living on a dollar a day in sub-Saharan Africa is unlikely to be met. Cutting aid budgets in the midst of a global recession adds to the African crisis of 200 million people going hungry every day and 33 million children being undernourished.

Achieving the MDG on poverty reduction is estimated to be postponed by at least three years now, over which time 400,000 more children will die. To quote Mrs Machel again, "aid means saving lives, it's not a luxury".

The question for the Government must be: have they got the

balance right between aid and foreign policy spending? We know that the DfID budget is set at something like £1.2 billion. The FCO's budget is about £33.5 million for bilateral programmes for political stability and good governance in the longer term. Is that right?

This brings me to progress with parliamentary strengthening and democratic stability. Recently, several African presidents have changed—or are seeking to change—constitutional term limits that prevent them seeking a third term in office. Examples include **Uganda**, Tunisia, Algeria and Cameroon. In **Uganda**, President Museveni's long rule has brought a degree of stability and peace, and a developing multi-political party Parliament. There are nevertheless warning signs that this stability could be undermined—for example, the September riots in Kampala that left 27 people dead and more than 100 arrested, and led to the forced closure of at least five radio stations. That was followed by claims of the abduction and torture of senior journalists.

There is a sense among humanitarian organisations such as War Child that there is now a gap between the phasing out of emergency funding in **Uganda** and the lead into development funding. Human Rights Watch notes that there has been a lack of a cohesive response from the donor community to the events that took place in Kampala in September. It is against this background that the amendment of the presidential term limits from two to three in some countries is not seen as supportive of free and fair elections, but is, in **Uganda** in 2011, essential to retaining stability and peace in the region. Have the Government had any discussions concerning the changes that are taking place in **Uganda's** presidential term limits?

We work very closely with the **Ugandan** Government. I would be interested to know what the Government's reaction has been to, for example, the reappointment of the National Electoral Commission, which has taken place in spite of accusations of fraud in the **Ugandan** court. What plans do our Government have to provide technical or financial support to the conduct of the 2011 elections scheduled in **Uganda**? DfID is supporting and training counterterrorism operations in **Uganda**, but Human Rights Watch and others have meanwhile been highlighting allegations of repeated state-sanctioned human rights abuses. What action are the Government taking to support and develop reforms through current bilateral training programmes?

Looking at counterterrorism in the Great Lakes region, the **Lord's Resistance Army** remains a threat to regional stability in northern **Uganda**, southern Sudan, eastern Democratic Republic of **Congo** and parts of the Central African Republic. Civilian protection must remain a critical priority. In this context, there is

currently no coherent international plan to apprehend and remove the **LRA** from the Great Lakes region. However, the United States Congress has before it draft legislation entitled the **LRA** Disarmament and North **Uganda** Recovery Act. More than 150 members of Congress have signed up to it. Would the Government consider making commitments similar to those outlined in the draft US Act, which many consider to be an excellent model to follow? In that context, and with MONUC's mandate due to be renewed shortly, do the Government support extending this mandate to include the apprehension of Joseph Kony and other **LRA** commanders?

The year 2010 will be crucial for the **DRC** and **Rwanda**. The **DRC** will probably hold local elections in 2010, with national elections in 2011. Respect for the rule of law and democratic institutions will need to be embedded to help those elections run smoothly. MONUC is doing a good job, but it needs to prepare for transition by focusing on institution-building, the role of Parliament, the judiciary and so forth. What role are our Government planning for the United Kingdom in institutional strengthening and electoral registration? Resource exploitation and corruption are the underlying sources of conflict in the **DRC**, as confirmed by DfID's own report and studies into exports over several years. In some cases it was found that the export of minerals was more than double the volumes recorded for tax purposes—a clear case for international corruption investigation, if ever I heard one.

With regard to relations between **Rwanda** and the **DRC**, we should all welcome a meeting in August between Mr Kagame and Mr Kabila, but there are still concerns over **Rwanda's** alleged support of rebel groups in the **DRC** only last year. We note that **Rwanda** has formally applied to join the Commonwealth; that application will be considered by a Commonwealth summit in 2010. Do the Government agree that before **Rwanda** is accepted into the Commonwealth, we must ensure that the criteria of Commonwealth core values of human rights, democracy and democratic institutions in an open and free society are first met?

Other noble Lords have mentioned climate change; I will comment briefly on Africa and climate change. Kofi Annan made the point when addressing the Global Editors' Forum last month that it is a tragic irony that the countries which have done the least to cause climate change are those which are suffering, and will suffer, most from its impacts. Although Africa accounts for only 3 per cent of total global carbon emissions, it must now bear the brunt of climate change. The estimated financial impact could be as high as \$130 billion in Africa. The impacts can already be seen in devastating floods in Burkina Faso and the

droughts that have killed thousands of livestock in northern Kenya. However, African countries will barely be represented at the Copenhagen conference next month. Do the Government agree that African nations must have a more prominent role in future international climate talks?

Finally, I turn to Africa and China, which other noble Lords have commented on. China is heading to overtake the EU as Africa's biggest trading partner. China is already beginning to exert political influence and power, akin to that of the western imperial powers in past centuries, since Chinese companies frequently plan against 30-year timescales as a minimum. This can be incredibly problematic for western nations, which put democracy, the rule of law and human rights into the mix of international trading agreements.

The worrying case in point is the Chinese position in a growing clash over diplomatic and trade relations with Guinea in west Africa. Guinea is central in the region's trafficking of cocaine and other narcotics to Europe. A common initiative agreed between United Nations agencies and other west African coastal countries to curb this trade has already been compromised by elements of the ruling military junta in Guinea engaged in this very narcotics trafficking. In reaction to the presidential guard publicly raping and butchering more than 150 protestors in Conakry, the EU and the AU have imposed economic and financial sanctions, but their effects are being diluted by China's decision to sign a \$7 billion mining deal with Guinea, the world's largest exporter of bauxite. The question for the West, and our Government, is whether China is straying into short-termism by striking secret deals with corrupt Governments and will discover that such investments are high risk over time, and in any case do little to benefit Africa's development.

The whole point of NePAD, the new economic plan for Africa, is to create sound investment criteria through transparency, the rule of law, democracy and human rights and to break the cycle of corruption, despotism and instability which marred the post-colonial period and made inward investment into Africa too high a risk. China, it seems, has to learn from the past mistakes that most African nations are steadfastly trying to overcome.

Proceeding: [81107](#)

Legislature: House of Lords (HoL)

Place: Lords Chamber

Session: 09-10

Type: Debate

Date of Proceeding: 23.11.2009

Reference:	501 c269
Member:	Miliband, David
Title:	Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Defence
Description:	<p>My reading of the Goldstone report suggests that it raises issues for the state of Israel, rather than for individuals involved in the conflict. We have made it clear that the first step in response to that report is for a full and transparent independent inquiry into the allegations to take place.</p> <p>On conflict in Africa, in the past year we have seen glimmers of hope in Somalia, with the appointment of President Sharif and the inclusive nature of the Djibouti process. That is important because stability in Somalia will come only through agreement to share power at clan and regional level, and instability there has severe implications for not only the horn of Africa, but the rest of the world. Piracy is just one aspect of that. The House will be pleased to learn that the unity and resolve of the international community in responding to this issue has meant that of those ships following the route that is protected by the EU forces and other navies and complying with industry agreed best practice just one has been hijacked in the gulf of Aden since last December. Safety in the 1 million square miles of the Somali basin is, however, much harder to deliver, as, unfortunately, has been proved by the kidnap of the British couple Paul and Rachel Chandler. The thoughts of the whole House will be with them and those working for their release.</p> <p>In eastern Congo, the humanitarian and human rights situation remains dire, but the rapprochement between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo means that for the first time in years there is a real chance of progress.</p>
Proceeding:	81166
Legislature:	House of Commons (HoC)
Place:	Commons Chamber
Session:	09-10
Type:	Debate
Date of Proceeding:	23.11.2009
Reference:	501 c292-5
Member:	Davey, Edward
Title:	Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Defence
Description:	<p>Many others have interpreted the position slightly differently, and we have been talking to those people. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife, who is one of Parliament's pre-eminent experts in the field, is examining precisely such issues.</p>

On Iran, no one can doubt that the situation remains alarming, and I agree in part with the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks. I also agree with others about the need to condemn the way Iran has treated our consular employees. The shocking recent International Atomic Energy Agency report says much about how Iran has been deceiving the world, yet the current question for policy makers on Iran is whether the diplomatic engagement and negotiations have reached the end of the road and it is now time for sanctions or whether there is room still for at least one more go at negotiations. Even if one could be sure that Russia would support tougher United Nations sanctions—and I am not—the recent discussions on a deal over uranium for the Tehran research reactor seemed to me still to have real life in them. As the Foreign Secretary alluded to earlier, it is true that the Iranians are insisting that any uranium swap occurs in Iran, not outside Iran, but would the Six really want to be responsible for walking away from the diplomatic route because they were unwilling to compromise on the detail of a deal? I hope not. The right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks may be right that we need to prepare some of the background for sanctions, but I would keep the tool of sanctions in the box at least for a little while longer, because if a deal is struck on the uranium swap, the chances of getting Iran to discuss the military dimension and the outstanding issues increases. Indeed, those chances could be improved if they were combined with a focus on other issues of common concern, especially, of course, Afghanistan.

While the nuclear issue as it relates to North Korea gets less attention in this House—it has not been spoken about today—I urge the Government to do all they can to get the Pyongyang regime back to the Six-power talks. Too often we appear to believe that North Korea is fundamentally a show for the US and China to work on with South Korea, and we underplay the role of the European Union. I want to speak more about the new EU High Representative later, but given Baroness Ashton's success in trade talks with South Korea, perhaps she has the contacts and understanding to help make a breakthrough if the Council were to empower her to explore the options. This needs to be more of a priority for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Obviously, the nuclear issue is only one of many where a multilateral, multi-polar approach to foreign policy is essential. However, as other colleagues will no doubt speak at length on issues such as the climate change conference, the need for the G20 to collaborate on the economy, or the millennium development goals, I will not touch on them now, but I want to reflect briefly on some of the continuing challenges for multilateralism, beginning with the role of China.

There is much to welcome about the role of China, and the part it wishes to play in the world. China's economic influence is well known, and the Chinese response to the global recession has been helpful. In some respects, the proposals from the Chinese on climate change reveal real leadership and understanding, but China's approach in all too many countries and its focus on economic issues before and above any consideration of other, wider concerns, such as humanitarian issues or international law, is alarming.

Let me give a few examples. In Sri Lanka, the Chinese sold large amounts of weapons to the Sri Lankan Government and in return have been allowed many commercial opportunities, especially in terms of the development of a massive port in Sri Lanka that is of strategic economic and security importance to the Chinese. Far from not interfering in domestic politics, as the Chinese protest is their position, that policy was calculated and deliberate. While I welcome the Sri Lankan Government's announcement that they are to allow those in the internally displaced person camps to move freely, surely that remains an inadequate response to the humanitarian disaster in some of those camps. Moreover, that announcement was certainly not a result of pressure from the Chinese, but it may well have been a result of pressure from the EU, which proposed not to renew the generalised system of preferences—GSP—plus trade concessions. I hope the Government and the EU are not going to go soft on the GSP plus trade concessions and our concerns about human rights in Sri Lanka just because of this weekend's announcement.

The Chinese are easily the largest foreign investors in Sudan, and probably also the largest market for its oil. At the United Nations, the Chinese have blocked stronger international progress and appear to have done nothing behind the scenes to get the Khartoum Government to stop the actions of the Janjaweed and other Government-backed militias in Darfur.

Elsewhere in Africa, from Zimbabwe to the Democratic Republic of the [Congo](#), we see the Chinese winning knock-down deals, partly because their contracts come with no questions asked. There are apologists who say, "Well, the west has done exactly the same" or "China has brought lots of investment." Well, that may be so, but I do not believe that such investments inevitably require a power such as China to adopt an amoral stance. There are plenty of examples of investment in developing countries being used smartly to lever improvements for their wider population—this is a question of political will. China would win more friends and influence, and would boost the multilateralism it professes, if it wielded its economic

muscle in more enlightened ways—I hope that President Obama has been saying as much on his recent trip.

As we approach the end of the first year of President Obama's first term, many commentators are circling to lambast him for the lack of progress, but on the big issues they are utterly wrong. On Afghanistan, they say that he has delayed, but I think that he is right not to rush. On Iran, they say that he has been too willing to focus on diplomacy, but I think that he needs to be encouraged to stick with it. On the middle east, they say that he has made little progress, but I think he has been courageous and right to expose Israel on the critical issue of the settlements. Prime Minister Netanyahu, Likud and their coalition partners are in real danger of totally isolating and undermining the moderate Palestinians and Arabs—people who have been patient and moderate despite all the humiliations. For Israel's sake, I hope that the Israeli Government wake up soon and realise that while settlement expansion continues it is simply unreasonable to expect any Palestinian leader to negotiate.

Of course we know that Israelis still suffer dreadfully under the threat of terrorist attack, especially from the rockets of Hamas and others, and the international community must always remember to condemn such indiscriminate attacks made on civilians populations, but how does alienating Palestinians from their more moderate leaders in Fatah and elsewhere hinder and hurt Hamas? How does the continuing blockade of Gaza win over the Palestinians? Obama must try to get Netanyahu to face up to that political reality. If he does not, I fear that the long-term peace and security Israel rightly craves and deserves will be postponed still further.

I wish to touch briefly on two issues before concluding, the first of which is the European Union and the second of which is Iraq. We are to have a debate on European affairs shortly, so I will keep my remarks on the EU particularly short. However, given the significance of the recent final ratification of the Lisbon treaty and the decisions for the new President of the European Council and the High Representative, I want to welcome the opportunity Europe has to press ahead and act more effectively on the practical European and international problems that affect our constituents, be they on the economy, the environment or organised crime.

With the institutional wrangling over, the EU can be more effective on foreign and security policy than in the past. Of course that will not happen overnight—it was never going to—but with the sensible appointments of Herman Van Rompuy and Baroness Cathy Ashton, real progress will be made. The Foreign Secretary had argued that we needed a President of the

European Council who would stop the traffic in Beijing. That was not only wrong, but it was the reverse of how he and his colleagues sold the provisions for this post in this House and in the public debate. The then Minister for Europe, the right hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Mr. Murphy), and I both argued that these posts were rightly constrained by the requirements for unanimity on foreign and security policy, and were about greater efficiency and effectiveness. The Conservatives and others sought to ignore that reality; they scaremongered about European Presidents and Foreign Ministers as if the new posts came with great decision-making powers, whereas, in reality, they are the servants of the nation states. It would serve the argument against Euroscepticism better if the Foreign Secretary's line on Europe was more consistent and if he left the confusion on Europe to the Conservatives. Pro-Europeans need to take the European debate to the Conservatives on foreign policy, be that on EU-Russia relations, the middle east or elsewhere.

The Foreign Secretary opened this debate with an upbeat assessment of the situation in Iraq, but when one reads a lot of the reports, one finds that the political and economic situation there is extremely fragile. Of course we hope that more progress will be made, but Britain and the others who invaded Iraq need to be there to ensure that we deliver on our development commitments. When the Iraq inquiry was announced, the Liberal Democrats raised serious concerns about its structure, timetable and membership. On the eve of its opening its public sessions, new concerns have arisen. The Cabinet Office recently published a protocol on the documents for that inquiry, which specifically excludes some documents even going to the inquiry and puts a series of restrictions on what documents the inquiry can publish. I do not believe that that is delivering on what the Prime Minister promised when he announced the inquiry. Many others are concerned about how the secretariat for the inquiry is being staffed not by lots of outside experts in a mixture with civil servants, but by people who were all in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or in the defence and the intelligence services at the time. We believe that they do not give the inquiry the independence that it needs.

Our foreign policy deliberations will remain scarred over the question of the Iraq war unless and until the inquiry is got right. We should have learned the lessons earlier and I believe that our efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere would be rather more effective if this inquiry had happened earlier. I hope that it will be able to deliver the full, independent and comprehensive verdict that we need to go forward.

Proceeding:

81166

Legislature:	House of Commons (HoC)
Place:	Commons Chamber
Session:	09-10

Type:	Debate
Date of Proceeding:	23.11.2009
Reference:	501 c353-5
Member:	Milton, Anne

Title: Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Defence

Description: Yes, it is welcome, and I have to give some praise to the Government on this: progress in this country has been quite significant. GAPS highlights examples of women's contributions to reconstruction and also the way forward for the implementation of resolution 1325 as well as, of course, the UK national action plan.

Resolution 1325 was passed unanimously in October 2000. In 2004, the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, issued a report on its implementation, and called for all member states to develop a national action plan to ensure the implementation of the resolution. To date, 16 countries, including two post-conflict countries, have developed a national action plan. The UK Government were among the first to develop a national action plan, which was launched on international women's day in 2006. The strategy links Government, humanitarian, defence, security, diplomacy and conflict work, all of which are important to conflict resolution and peace building. The five core areas are supporting the mainstreaming of a gender perspective at the UN in peace and security policy; training and policy within government; gender justice, including on gender-based violence; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration; and working with civil society. Within those core areas there are 12 action points.

Why does all this matter? A briefing by Widows for Peace through Democracy makes several points. Widows make up a significant proportion of the female population in all societies, but in conflict-afflicted countries their number—there are very few official statistics on this—has risen to an extraordinary and unprecedented level. Rough estimates vary widely, but it is thought that there are more than 2 million widows in Afghanistan—70,000 in Kabul alone, where, according to a UN report, nearly all the 37,000 street children are fatherless—and probably more than 3 million widows in Iraq. The number may be much higher in both those countries, where many women are the wives of the disappeared or missing. It is suggested that as many as 70 per cent. of children in [Rwanda](#) are dependent on

widowed mothers, and in eastern Congo more than 50 per cent. of women are widows. Similarly, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Burundi all need to identify the impact on society of such increases in widowhood.

It is impossible to raise awareness without proper reliable data. Governments, non-governmental organisations and the UN do not have the vital information needed to protect the widows and their dependants, and to ensure that they can access basic services, are protected from violence and have legal protection to ensure their rights to inheritance, property and land ownership. These widows are bringing up the next generation of children, and their role in post-conflict reconstruction is vital. The prospects of the widows and their children after war reflect the prospects of these countries as a whole. We need to know what is happening so that we can direct support on the ground and turn around the fortunes of so many war-torn families—so many war-torn widows and their children—and, thus, turn around the future of their countries.

The initial intervention in Afghanistan was partly justified on the basis of liberating Afghan women from subjugation, violence and injustice. Some 68 of the 249 Afghan MPs are women—that exceeds the 25 per cent. quota—but at least six women MPs have been killed in the past two years. With the exception of the Minister of Women's Affairs, all of Afghanistan's Cabinet posts are held by men. Only one out of the 32 governors is a woman, and women number only 233 of an estimated 62,000 officers in the Afghan national police. It would be helpful to know how the Government will support women's participation in the proposed summit in early 2010, which our Prime Minister announced. A WOMANKIND Worldwide report in 2008 showed that in Afghanistan 87 per cent. of women are affected by domestic violence, 60 per cent. of marriages are forced and 57 per cent. of girls are married before their 16th birthday. In addition, despite improvements having been made, only 5 per cent. of girls are enrolled in schools.

Figures are extremely hard to get on sexual and gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but the UN estimates that 27,000 women were raped in 2006 in South Kivu province alone. The true figures are impossible to verify, but according to one analyst rape is underreported and "the actual numbers are unimaginable".

There are certain things that our Government can do. There seems to be no central point within government driving the women, peace and security agenda forward. The lack of clear lines of responsibility makes the advancement of the national

action plan difficult. That plan does not cover interventions in specific countries and Northern Ireland is omitted. The plan has no specific resources or funds attached; all activities are expected to be completed through existing departmental budgets. It remains disconnected from the wider conflict and security policy and other gender equality frameworks. The lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms makes it almost impossible to assess the plan's impact.

Women are an immense resource for building a peaceful and sustainable future, but their voices rarely reach the negotiating tables or political spaces. Violence against women is still seen as an unfortunate by-product of conflict and is largely left unchallenged. Such violence and exclusions must be confronted to assist societies in becoming more stable and peaceful for us all. Understanding the realities, needs and capacities of women as well as those of men must lie at the heart of peace-building efforts if an inclusive and sustainable peace and security is to be achieved. Ignoring such issues is costly, both for conflict-affected regions and for the international community.

Proceeding: [81166](#)

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