



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

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Our reference: 76650

Anne Milton MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Anne,

Thank you for your letter of 10 September to the Foreign Secretary about data collection of widows and women in armed conflict. I am replying as the Minister for Global Issues.

The UK recognises the importance of addressing the problems faced by women in all stages of conflict; from conflict prevention through to peacebuilding. As you are aware, we work on this issue at the UN, with regional organisations and in conflict affected countries, to promote a positive role for women in conflict resolution and to combat gender-based violence.

The UK government provides support to women affected by conflict through a range of activities, including the Department for International Development's (DFID) work on gender equality, humanitarian assistance and the tri-departmental Conflict Pool. It includes support to women's organisations who work to promote women's engagement in peace processes and to prevent sexual violence in conflict. DFID's Gender Equality Action Plan and Gender Duty Scheme also set out a comprehensive set of actions aimed at strengthening the gender equality focus and impact of UK government development programmes. In this work, we do not specifically direct assistance to widows or widows' groups. However, we believe that our work to support gender equality, women's empowerment and women in conflict have an important impact for all women, including widows.

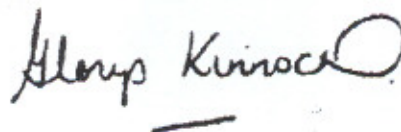
You raised the importance of collecting data on widows and women more generally in armed conflict, in order to provide more effective assistance. We do not currently carry out work to consolidate such data collection. However, DFID have developed guidance on "Gender and Social Exclusion Analysis". This is used by all DFID Country Offices in Africa to develop gender action plans and ensure that our bilateral programmes address the most excluded groups. DFID are also working to develop gender disaggregated statistics in their development work in order to better identify the particular issues faced by women, including widows. Your suggestion to include the facilitation of more usable statistics about widows in Afghanistan is welcome and we will look to add this issue to the agenda of the next NGO Afghanistan roundtable.

The need for effective data collection on women in conflict has been recognised by the international community, particularly in the role that the UN can play, given its reach and involvement in conflict areas. We are taking steps at the UN, including through the follow-on resolution to UN Security Council Resolution 1820, to press for more effective monitoring and reporting of incidents and trends in conflict-related sexual violence, in order to identify gaps in the UN response.

In terms of UK support to the Afghan Central Statistics Office (CSO), we are helping in a number of ways: by supporting its application to participate in the 'Statistics for Results' Facility of the World Bank; by providing support, with the European Commission, to develop the CSO's statistical master plan, including a capacity-building strategy; and by providing real-time support to the CSO from our statistical adviser. This approach should help to ensure that widows and other marginalised groups are considered in plans for data collection and surveys.

The UK has also provided support to the Afghanistan 2007/8 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment. We expect that the final report, due later this year, will provide some data on the situation of widows. In addition, we work closely with the European Commission, which is taking the lead for donors on social protection in Afghanistan and are working up plans on support to marginalised vulnerable groups, including widows.

I hope that you find this information helpful and would like to thank you for your continuing work to champion the cause of vulnerable women.



BARONESS KINNOCK
Minister of State