



Associate Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security
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Lord Malloch Brown
Minister of State
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
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13 January 2009

Dear Mark,

House of Lords Queen's Speech debate, 04 December 2008 – Women, peace and security

We write in our joint capacity as chairs of the Associate Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security (APG-WPS). The APG-WPS is a large association of parliamentarians, civil society representatives and civil servants working on women, peace and security and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), which formally recognises the roles and needs of women in the context of conflict. During the House of Lords Queen's Speech debate on 04 December 2008 at which you spoke for HM Government, Baroness Prosser made a speech – the content of which we fully support – on the issues of women, peace and security (HoL Official Report, 04 Dec 2008 col:110-112). As you were unable to respond to the points which Lady Prosser raised, we are following up in writing with you.

The UK government has a strong record in addressing women, peace and security issues for which we are proud. Indeed, HMG was one of the first UN members to launch a National Action Plan (NAP) on women, peace and security in March 2006 and we remain one of just ten countries to have done so - we praise the government for taking this step. However, in our view, this issue remains too far down the mainstream political and parliamentary agenda. It is the role of the APG-WPS to monitor and evaluate HMG's implementation of the Action Plan, to ensure it doesn't slip off the government's radar and to ensure women, peace and security moves higher up the parliamentary agenda. In her speech, Lady Prosser made specific reference to Afghanistan: this is a country on which our Group has focused for some time, and was the topic of our last parliamentary plenary meeting in November (a record of which is enclosed). There are a few specific and important points from both this meeting and Lady Prosser's speech which we would like to raise with you:

1. **Direct Budgetary Support:** Although we agree that it is correct for HMG to prioritise state building and to increase the capacity of the Afghan state through direct budgetary support – strong state institutions and governance are of course essential for the long-term stability for any fragile state – we are concerned about the proportion of British aid targeted at national and local civil society organisations in Afghanistan. Direct budgetary support to the Afghan government currently lies at around 80%. Our particular concern is that only a tiny proportion of this funding is trickling down to local NGOs and community groups working on inclusive peace, gender equality, as well as those supporting women and making a real impact at the community level. Indeed, in her remarks Lady

Prosser made reference to one of our members' (*Women for Women International*) survey showing that less than half those who responded felt that the Afghan government was doing anything about women rights, such as improving access to justice, legal reform or tackling impunity. What representations has HMG made to the Afghan government to assure that they adopt a gender sensitive approach to peacebuilding, reconstruction, security sector reform and development, and to assure that funds provided through direct budgetary support reaches civil society organisations, including women's organisations that are working on these issues at the local level?

2. **Enforcement and enactment of law:** The Afghan government passed the Marriage Contract law in 2007, setting the minimum age for marriage at 16 years. However, this law is not enforced and there is widespread impunity for those who break it. Our partners estimate that half of all girls are married before 16 and that 60% of all marriages are forced. Further to this, we are also gravely concerned that, in a country where an estimated 80% of women are subjected to domestic violence, the violence against women law remains in draft form only. What representations are HMG making to the Afghan government in relation to these points? Furthermore, given the UK record in supporting the implementation of UNSCR 1325, what actions are HMG taking to encourage the Afghan government to adopt a National Action Plan towards the implementation of this UN resolution?
3. **Collection of data:** Although not a point raised by Lady Prosser in the House, we think it is important to note the difficulty of collecting credible data in Afghanistan, which is vital in ensuring that assistance (military, technical, financial or any other type) is effectively targeted. We commend DFID for now sponsoring a project for the collection of better data and information on the impact of policy on gender equality and hope that the results of this project will be made publicly available. This leads us to the question of how will HMG use the data collected in the formulation of policy on Afghanistan?

Although we have raised three specific points in this letter, there are many issues surrounding women, peace and security in Afghanistan and other conflict affected regions that merit increased attention by HMG. We would be most grateful if you would agree to meet with parliamentary members of the APG-WPS during 2009 to discuss these and other issues relating to women, peace and security in more detail. In the meantime, we would very much appreciate your response to these points and also to Lady Prosser's comments in the House of Lords.

Our best wishes,

Anne Milton MP
Joint Chair

Baroness Uddin
Joint Chair

CC: *Gareth Thomas MP, Minister of State, DFID*
Baroness Prosser, House of Lords