



Associate Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security  
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Rt. Hon. David Miliband MP  
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I write in my capacity as Joint Chair of the APG on Women, Peace and Security (APG-WPS) to raise with you issues of data collection of widows - and women more generally - in armed conflict.

The failure to address problems faced by widows in fragile and conflict affected states, not only fails to address gross human rights abuses, but also frustrates efforts to procure a sustainable peace based on equality, the rule of law, democracy and justice. Tradition and customs deprive widows of inheritance, land and property rights and poverty forces them and their girl children into prostitution while their sons, unable to attend school, are easily recruited by warlords and criminal gangs. However, effective interventions can not be targeted when the problem remains concealed and no accurate statistics are available.

In Afghanistan, it is thought that there are over 2 million widows: 70,000 in Kabul alone, where almost all of the 37,000 street children are, according to a UN report, fatherless. In Iraq, there are an estimated 3 million widows, and the picture is similar in many other conflict and post-conflict areas. These statistics are not accurate, and, the real figures are likely to be much higher. Indeed, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which the UK sponsored in the Council, notes the "need to consolidate data on the impact of armed conflict on women". The APG-WPS held a meeting on this issue on 8 July and it is an issue where HMG could take concrete action and make a real impact.

At the meeting, we saw a video produced by a Nepali women's group describing their projects to map widows countrywide. The project supports women across communities to collect data which is collated centrally giving an accurate picture of widowhood across Nepal – a methodology devised by UK based NGO, Widows for Peace Through Democracy. We also heard from Women for Women International, an organisation working in many post/conflict states. All women involved in their programmes complete questionnaires assisting with data collection and targeted assistance: many other organisations work in a similar way. The problem at hand is not a complete lack of data per se, but consolidation. It is here where HMG can make a valuable contribution.

How is HM Government cooperating with NGOs working in conflict affected areas to consolidate data on the impact of conflict on widows, and is this an area where further cooperation is necessary? The FCO, for example, regularly coordinates roundtable meetings with NGOs working in Afghanistan which could be used to facilitate the collection of more usable statistics allowing for affective and targeted assistance to be provided. How does HM Government work to support widows affected by conflict, and specifically support indigenous widows associations as an existing networks to provide relief? More specifically, what support does HM Government give the Afghan Central Office of Statistics to disaggregate its data and ensure statistics on widowhood are collected, how does the Ministry for Women contribute to this?

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this important issue.

With best wishes,

Anne Milton MP  
Joint Chair

CC: Rt. Hon. Douglas Alexander MP, Secretary of State for International Development