

## UK Response to Special Rapporteur on VAW, UN Human Rights Council February 2019

Thank you for your letter of 1 February, seeking views on the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (VAW), and requesting input on the primary obstacles in addressing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in all its forms. We are providing a response to questions 1 and 6.

With regards to the main challenges addressing VAWG in its various forms, the UK views the following as some of the primary obstacles:

- **The lack of incisive international leadership to frame VAWG as 1) an issue that is inherently rooted in gender inequality and 2) a systemic and pervasive human rights abuse.** The conceptualisation of the prevalence and forms of VAWG is often distorted and its drivers incorrectly identified. This undermines the potential impact of policies and programmes to reduce rates of VAWG. There needs to be greater understanding that intimate partner violence is the most prevalent form of VAWG, even in conflict contexts, and that it shares common drivers with other forms of VAWG, and for this to be factored into efforts to end VAWG.
- **A lack of understanding of how pervasive VAWG is and how it can undermine efforts to improve outcomes in other areas**, such as economic development, education and climate change. This lack of understanding on the prevalence and impact of VAWG can lead to a lack of political will to invest in actions to end VAWG. Although data is limited in many contexts, it is essential to assume that VAWG is happening in every humanitarian crisis, and to take action accordingly. To this end the Call to Action to Protect Women and Girls in Emergencies aims to strengthen global prevention and response to violence in emergencies.
- **Insufficient action and focus on prevention of violence before it occurs**. While it remains vitally important to provide high quality services and effective justice for survivors, interventions aimed at preventing VAWG are also essential to stop the cycle of violence before it starts. Such interventions need to respond to multiple forms of violence.
- **A lack of investment in scaling up proven interventions to prevent violence.** The UK Department for International Development's 'What Works to Prevent Violence' research and innovation programme engages leading international experts to produce rigorous evidence on prevalence, patterns and drivers of VAWG, and the most effective approaches to prevent it. A number of evaluated pilots have shown significant reductions in violence (up to 50%), proving that violence is preventable. The evidence is a global public good, intended to help governments and international partners everywhere to improve the effectiveness of their efforts to prevent VAWG. It is essential for governments and international actors to make use of this evidence to scale up their efforts to end VAWG.
- **While the evidence base has expanded, there are still significant gaps in research and further investment in data and evidence is crucial.** There is a lack of rigorous evidence from low and middle-income countries on prevalence, drivers

and effectiveness of prevention and response mechanisms to reduce violence against marginalised groups of women and girls. A femicide observatory could potentially contribute to tackling this gap in some contexts.

- **A lack of leadership and accountability on gender equality within the humanitarian system.** Whilst the international community has made strong commitments on gender equality in humanitarian crises, voluntary reporting has produced insufficient evidence to enable us to track performance against those commitments. Effective, strong leadership is vital to drive up international standards and strengthen our capability to prevent and respond to gendered needs in emergencies.

With regards to the opportunities and challenges for strengthening and using the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, we would like to encourage the Special Rapporteur to implement her mandate in conjunction with existing UN and regional mandates designed to prevent and respond to violence against women, including on issues such as preventing sexual violence in conflict.