



Briefing on the 2022 PSVI Declaration

October 2022

Introduction

This briefing is based on a review of the 2014 Declaration, drawing in key insights from the [Independent Commission for Aid Impact's \(ICAI\) review of PSVI](#) and on discussions with experts, including those who were involved with the 2014 Declaration and the Safe Schools Declaration.

It provides an outline on how to deliver a successful 2022 PSVI Declaration, as well as ensure the success of the FCDO's PSVI campaign after the conference. The following provides a summary of the main recommendations, which are fleshed out further in the briefing:

How to deliver a successful 2022 PSVI Declaration

- 1. Clearer definitions and sections:** In the 2022 Declaration, there is a need for clarity and cohesion regarding the definition of conflict related sexual violence (CRSV). This includes the need to highlight the disproportionate impact of violence on women and girls, while simultaneously strengthening empowering language—through the use of the term “survivor” over “victim” – and strengthening the intersectional focus of the Declaration.
- 2. Emphasising the importance of prevention:** In the next Declaration, there must be an increase in the focus on gender-based violence (GBV) prevention. Given that the root cause of GBV is gender inequality, the emphasis on prevention will be essential if the UK is to achieve its aim of ending CRSV in the long term.
- 3. Strengthened language on the role and funding of women-led organisations:** In the 2022 Declaration, language can be strengthened to capture the key role of women-led civil society across a range of initiatives from consultations and service provision, as well as the importance of funding women-led civil society.

How to ensure the success of the PSVI campaign, including Declaration

- 1. Funding:** While the UK has succeeded in raising the profile of addressing CRSV globally, there have been long-term funding challenges which will need to be addressed to deliver a successful Declaration and broader PSVI campaign. Recommendations include funding evidence-based GBV prevention and response services, providing quality funding, and ensuring funding reaches women's rights organisations and survivor-led networks.
- 2. Reviewing the commitments:** Given lack of accountability issues experienced in previous the previous Declaration and broader PSVI campaign, the UK has an opportunity to rectify this by reporting on commitments on a regular basis. We recommend bi-annual reviews of commitments, with meaningful engagement from women's rights organisations and survivor-led networks as well.
- 3. Political prioritisation:** In order to maintain focus and attention on the PSVI campaign, it will be important to ensure it is prioritised at the highest political level. Waning political leadership and the impact it has on funding and implementation of PSVI was made clear in ICAI's report. The briefing's recommendations include the Foreign Secretary keeping PSVI a top priority, including bringing PSVI to Cabinet level and engagement beyond the Summit.

How to deliver a successful 2022 PSVI Declaration

1. Providing clearer definitions and sections

Clarifying definitions

It is welcome in the 2014 Declaration that CRSV is named as “one of the most serious forms of violation or abuse of an individual’s human rights” and that CRSV “is not an inevitable consequence of war”. This language should be maintained. However, there is no explicit or full definition of CRSV provided in the Declaration. It is mentioned that rape and other forms of sexual violence as weapons of war constitute CRSV, but the focus on rape as a weapon of war is too narrow, failing to capture the totality of CRSV.

This is a challenge because there is growing evidence - not least from the UK’s own flagship research initiative ‘[What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls](#)’ of which IRC is a key partner – of the opportunistic nature of CRSV by armed groups and other actors. This research also reveals the sharp rise in incidents of intimate partner violence (IPV) in conflict, when stress and uncertainty at the household level is high. Such evidence compels the Government not to be narrow sighted in its perspective on the drivers of different forms of CRSV and the most effective responses to reduce incidents of violence and meaningfully support survivors.

It is important that the Declaration conveys the wide breadth of CRSV, in order to do justice to the varied experiences of survivors of CRSV, and to capture the full breadth of conflict related sexual violence experienced. In the 2022 Declaration, we recommend using the following definition of conflict-related sexual violence: CRSV is violence which is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. These forms of violence could include rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilisation, forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by CRSV, but men and boys may experience it as well.

Bringing in a stronger intersectional lens

We welcome language in the 2014 Declaration committing to “ensuring women’s and girls’ full human rights and fundamental freedoms and women’s active, full and equal political, social and economic participation, including in all conflict prevention and resolution, justice and security sector processes, as well as in wider development activities, is critical to ending sexual violence in conflict.”

However, the 2014 Declaration was not explicit in acknowledging that the evidence to date – including from the FCDO-funded What Works to Prevent Violence programme – shows that women and girls in all their diversity are more likely to be impacted by CRSV than men and boys¹. It is important to acknowledge this, *and* it is simultaneously possible and essential to strengthen the intersectional approach of the Declaration, noting that there are many complex factors – such as gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, and/or disability – at play in the lived experiences of all survivors of CRSV.

Using the more empowering term “survivor” of GBV

The previous Declaration used the term “victim” of sexual violence. The term “survivor” is used most often by practitioners and policymakers, in order to present a more empowering term that promotes agency of persons who have experienced violence. We recommend a consistent use of this term through Summit documents, including the Declaration. This is important because it centres the agency of the individual; it moves away from interventions done ‘to’ passive victims, to an empowerment approach that works in partnership with those with lived experience of CRSV, to design and implement interventions to prevent and respond to CRSV.

2. Emphasising the importance of prevention

The root cause of GBV is gender inequality. In order to deliver on a commitment to end sexual violence, there needs to be concerted attention to and understanding of GBV prevention, and CRSV prevention within that.

In the previous Declaration, a large focus was given to bringing perpetrators to account. For example, the 2014

¹ What works to prevent violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian settings: Synthesis Brief. 2019. DFID, George Washington University, IRC. Available online: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/what-works-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls-conflict-and-humanitarian-crisis>

Declaration states that “we must shatter the culture of impunity for those who commit these crimes, by bringing those responsible to justice – as a critical element of our prevention efforts.” The language used in the Declaration counts accountability/access to justice as GBV Prevention, which may be promising but around which there is only limited and mixed evidence². This assumption jumps over the vital role of strong evidence-based GBV *prevention*—such as social norm change programmes that promote gender equality among women, men, and in communities.

It is welcome that this year's PSVI Summit will have a prominent focus on prevention and that the Minister Lord Ahmad has been raising this actively in his PSVI engagement at UNGA as well as bilateral meetings with other states. This should now also be reflected in the 2022 Declaration document to secure commitments and an ongoing focus on this issue going forward.

3. Strengthened language on the role and funding of women-led organisations

In the 2014 Declaration, it is welcome that women's participation and women-led organisations are mentioned in the commitments; however, there is scope to include the vital role of women-led organisations in the main body of the text to highlight their importance on this agenda.

It is important to strengthen the language on the role and funding of women-led organisations who are essential during all stages of addressing CRSV, from prevention, response services, to accessing justice and accountability mechanisms. Research from the IRC has found that women leaders and women-led organisations are first responders to crises, leaders in their communities, and experts on the needs of women and girls around them. And yet, they remain under-represented and under-resourced in the humanitarian sector.³

We have recommended adding the text in red to the previous 2014 Declaration text to provide examples of where the language regarding the role of women-led organisations could be strengthened:

- *Encourage, support, **fund** and protect the efforts of civil society organisations, including women's groups and human rights defenders, to improve **prevention, response and** the monitoring and documentation of cases of sexual violence in conflict without fear of reprisal and empower victims to access justice. **These groups will also be critical to the successful implementation of the PSVI campaign.***

It is welcome to see the link between the engagement and investment in national and local organisations and institutions. In addition to that, we would recommend including an explicit reference of women-led organisations as they are vital to the success of this ambition because they are often at the front line of providing GBV prevention and response services:

- *Support conflict-affected states in strengthening their capacity to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict and to develop and implement national security sector and justice reform programmes that take into full consideration the needs and rights of women and children, **working in partnership with women-led organisations.***

It will be essential to keep the following commitment because women-led organisations are often excluded from decision making and resource allocation at local level and add the following to strengthen it further:

- *“Promote women's **and women-led civil society's** full participation in all political, governance and security structures, as well as all decision-making processes, including peace negotiations, peacebuilding, prevention and accountability efforts, recognising the important contribution that National Action Plans on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 can play in this regard, and ensure that such processes also take into full consideration the needs and rights of women and children.*

These additions would help secure commitments on this vital issue and help ensure the importance of women led organisations remain central in the work towards preventing sexual violence in conflict.

² IRC, 2022. CRSV Teach in at FCDO. Kate Falb and Jeannie Annan Presentation.

³ IRC, 2021. Why Not Local: Gender-based violence, women's rights organisations, and the missed opportunity of COVID-19" Available online: <https://www.rescue.org/report/why-not-local-gender-based-violence-womens-rights-organisations-and-missed-opportunity-covid>

How to ensure the success of the PSVI campaign, including Declaration

1. Funding

While the UK has succeeded in raising the profile of addressing CRSV globally, there have been long-term funding challenges which will be crucial to address to deliver a successful Declaration and broader PSVI campaign.

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact on PSVI reported that “*between 2014 and 2019, PSVI funds managed by the London-based team [fell] from £15 million to £2 million per year*”.⁴ Additionally, according to ICAI, over 50% of funding for PSVI went to justice and accountability, with GBV prevention and GBV response receiving 23% of the funding each. Local and national partners of the PSVI initiatives largely met their stated outputs, with the ICAI report stating that “*they have also impressively navigated tight timelines, small budgets and the uncertainty created by the PSVI's reliance for the most part on short one-year funding cycles*”.

The existing commitment from the 2014 Declaration-- to “*ensure that sexual violence prevention and response efforts are prioritised and adequately funded from the first phase and throughout all responses to conflict and humanitarian emergencies*” -- is welcome and should remain in a future Declaration. However, to achieve this, it will require dedicated funding, including adequate funding to GBV prevention and response, and funding for women-led organisations responding to GBV. Specifically, we recommend the following:

- ➔ PSVI should generate new funds to support violence prevention, response, and gender equality, so that GBV is prevented from occurring in the long-term. Funding for GBV prevention services and GBV response services should be survivor-centred and informed by the context specific, lived realities of survivors of CRSV. Survivor services means ensuring safe and confidential services for survivors, where survivors are empowered to make decisions about what care they receive and whether or not they wish to access justice.
- ➔ Funding should be multi-year, flexible funding for long term interventions and should be aimed at funding GBV prevention and GBV response services. Long-term and quality funding is essential given the long-term nature of GBV prevention, which involves promoting gender equality and shifting social norms.
- ➔ Commitment and follow through in funding to women-led organisations, and survivor networks, so that their perspectives can be meaningfully taken forward for PSVI policy creation and implementation.

2. Reviewing the commitments

In order to be successful, the 2022 conference and Declaration must be seen as a starting point rather than finishing line. The ICAI report of PSVI noted that there was a lack of accountability, which meant that “*momentum was lost, and a number of survivors and survivor-led civil society organisations across contexts expressed great disappointment that they had received no update on progress towards the pledges.*”

The new Declaration should articulate clear measures of progress and accountability expected of all signatories. This can be achieved through regular review meetings in which signatories report progress against agreed commitments and are specifically accountable to women's rights organisations and survivor-led networks. This will help to ensure that we move from rhetoric to implementation, and crucially to offer an opportunity to monitor progress on funding and implementation, as well as make adjustments in order to ensure we remain on track to deliver progress. In particular, we recommend the following:

- ➔ Conduct biennial reviews of the commitments to discuss progress being made by each signatory. The UK can first be the host one, and then agree with other partners to host the subsequent reviews.

⁴ Independent Commission for Aid Impact. Report: The UK's preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-version/psvi/>

- ➔ Invite international organisations and civil society, including women's rights organisations and survivor-led civil society, to feed into these reviews to ensure a diverse set of views are considered in relation to the delivery of the PSVI commitments.

3. Political prioritisation

Although the UK successfully raised global awareness of CRSV following the 2014 campaign and Declaration, challenges regarding funding and implementation were directly linked to waning political leadership as the years went on.

According to the ICAI report, following the departure of the former Foreign Secretary William Hague, leadership on PSVI was not sustained, high-ministerial interest in PSVI declined, and dedicated staff working on PSVI decreased. This was further exacerbated by the fact that PSVI was not adequately linked to the UK's Women Peace and Security (WPS) National Action Plan (NAP), or to the Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) team.

There are a number of ways political leadership on PSVI can remain strong. We recommend the following:

- ➔ The Prime Minister - who launched last year's PSVI campaign - should ensure it remains a key priority for the Foreign Secretary's portfolio, bringing it to Cabinet level and ensuring that FCDO staffing and resources to deliver on the commitments is maintained.
- ➔ The new Foreign Secretary must go beyond attending the 2022 Summit to actively participating in the conference, alongside the new Minister for Development and the PM's Special Representative to PSVI Minister, to ensure the UK can remain a strong and active advocate for PSVI on the global stage.
- ➔ Making explicit policy and implementation linkages between PSVI and the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. The launch of the WPS NAP during the 2022 Summit signals the interconnectedness of these two agendas and the importance that they remain aligned and not siloed.