

Report to UNWomen NC of UK

On Wednesday January 18th I was invited to attend the APPG meeting where GAPS response to the government's actions from the National Action Plan was presented.

In attendance was

Baroness Hodgson Co-Chairman of the APPG on WPS and a member of the steering board for the FCO's PSVI.

Baroness Anelay, Government's special representative on PSVI and a minister at the FCO.

Mike Penning MP for Hemel Hempstead and Minister of State for the MOD.

Rory Stewart MP for Penrith and the border and Minister of state at DIFD.

Hannah Bond. Director of GAPS.

Also in attendance Air Commodore **James Linter** OBE Head of Defence engagement Strategy in MOD.

Helen Whately MP Faversham and Mid Kent and co-chair of APPG on WPS.

The meeting was opened by Baroness Fiona Hodgson and she welcomed everyone and explained the format of the meeting.

Mike Pennington was the first to speak as he had to be at another meeting later.

Mike explained how the MOD was very supportive of women's role in the armed services and how women were in some instances better than men. I think that some members in the audience thought that he was being a little patronizing when he referred to women being more sensitive to people's needs. I did think though that he was genuine and was committed to extending women's role. In 2018 the first women will be part of the SAS and as long as they pass the tests then there will not be any barrier to women being in all parts of the armed services. The main concern of the questions that followed his talk was about the conduct of the UN peace keepers, who were not just members of the armed forces but also administrators, advisers and non combatant staff. The UK is training peace keepers and are actually in South Sudan as Peace keepers. There are a lot of obstacles to overcome. The punishment for driving offences are often far more punitive than for sexual abuse or rape. The ultimate responsibility for UN Peace Keepers is the UN but the UK Government along with other governments was pushing for more control over UN personnel.

Baroness Anelay spoke about the various projects that HMG has undertaken in countries during and post conflict. Syria is a very difficult country to get into at the moment whether you were an Aid Agency, NGO or government envoy. There were so many difficulties for women and although the government made contact with Women's organisations in country, it often caused more danger for the women. HMG has been active in many countries post conflict with small and large projects. The projects that worked best were those that were requested from the women in situ. To me this seemed like common sense and I have heard this many times from government ministers. She went on to say that there had been positive impact on women in Columbia in teaching them their Human Rights and helping with finance. In the DR Congo helping women to combat VAWG and helping to recruit more women police officers in Sri Lanka. There will be a high level review and GAPS will be working with HMG to write the new NAP

2017 – 2020. The new UN Secretary General is committed to eliminating VAWG and is committed to raising the profile of WPS and helping to reduce the amount of violence against women.

Rory Stewart. Spoke very eloquently and spoke quite a lot of sense but didn't actually say anything of substance. He said it was very difficult to go into countries to help women during conflict, which we all knew, and it was very important for DIFD to work with women's groups and NGOs who are working on WPS, however he did go on to say that not all women's group are the same to work with and he was a bit negative. He gave an example of a women's group in Pakistan where all the women had university degrees from Europe and lots of money as a opposed to a group of women in the South Sudan who could neither read nor write and were suspicious of strangers. When pressed to ask for DIFD's priorities for 2017 -2020 he dodged the question. I am sure that DIFD are working on the WPS issue and there have been a lot of good works however, we did not get to hear of many. However, he did point out a few problems that occurred. For example, getting the right expert to the right place, not sending a heart specialist to a hospital that needed maternity services.

The Air Commodore didn't actually say anything at the meeting, I believe that he was there in an advisory role and if there were any questions that needed a military answer.

There were questions afterwards which did centre around the NAP. The NAP and GAPS' response have been put on line

These meetings are very good when ministers from the 3 departments attend as there are questions and as the meeting was full the MPs had to answer. The next NAP is going to be formulated by asking the women in country what they want and also what they need and then bringing it back to GAPS UK for input from the members.

Helen Whately summed up the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. It was possible to talk to minsters at the end but only briefly.

Janet Hodgson