

UK envoy launches anti-sexual violence initiative in S. Sudan

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August 9, 2012 (JUBA) - The British Ambassador to South Sudan on Wednesday officially launched an initiative seeking to prevent sexual violence mainly in conflict regions of the world's newest nation.

While speaking at the launch, Ambassador Alastair McPhail said the British government, under the Foreign Secretary's leadership, currently considers tackling sexual violence as its key priority in conflict prevention and peace-building globally.

"Rape and other forms of sexual violence have been used as weapons against women, men and children in conflicts across the world. In South Sudan we hear chilling tales of sexual violence first hand, reminding us that our action is more important than ever. Across the world, sexual violence is used as a weapon of war. This must stop," said McPhail.

The UK, the ambassador assured, will utilise its Presidency of the G8, effective from the beginning of next year, to reportedly run a year-long diplomatic campaign on preventing sexual violence in armed conflict.

He however said his government welcomes any form of support geared towards finding practical ways to ensure that survivors of sexual violence in South Sudan, feel confident to speak out, and are able to regain the dignity and rights due to them.

"The UK wants to see a significant increase in the number of successful prosecutions for these crimes, so that we erode and eventually demolish the culture of impunity. We want to help strengthen capability to gather and preserve evidence, to prevent sexual violence and to support victims", the UK envoy added.

He further pledged his government's commitment to continue assisting national governments, civil society and communities to increase the ability of law enforcement agencies, judiciaries, and human rights defenders.

"We want to use Britain's influence and diplomatic network to rally sustained international action and to push this issue up the global agenda," noted McPhail

Lona James Elia, a civil society activist, while speaking at the same event, also decried the problem of impunity, which she said has exacerbated the practice in South Sudan.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), violence against women, ranging from rape and sexual assault to domestic abuse, is pervasive in South Sudan, which suffered decades of war with the north.

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