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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
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# HOUSE OF LORDS

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<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Party/Group</b>
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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# House of Lords

Monday 17 June 2019

2.30 pm

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Ely.

## Plastic Bag Charge Question

2.36 pm

Asked by *Lord Hayward*

To ask Her Majesty's Government when they expect to make an announcement concerning the introduction of the 10p plastic bag charge in England.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Gardiner of Kimble) (Con):** My Lords, earlier this year we consulted on proposals to extend the charge to all retailers and to increase the minimum charge to 10p. To advance this matter, we will publish both the summary of responses and the Government's intended action very soon. This follows the banning of plastic straws, cotton buds and stirrers from next April, as well as our consultation on placing responsibility for the cost of managing packaging waste on producers.

**Lord Hayward (Con):** My Lords, in January 2018 the Prime Minister announced the intention to extend the single-use carrier bag charge to all retailers. Eight months later, it was announced that there would be consultation. Five months later, the consultation started. Four months after that, I received a letter from Defra saying that the announcement would be made soon. That was almost two months ago. Why is it possible to choose a Prime Minister in eight weeks when it is impossible for Defra to make a decision about bag charges—which all the industry favours—80 weeks?

**Lord Gardiner of Kimble:** My Lords, that is an intriguing comparison, but the position is that combining the publication of the summary and intended action will reduce the overall time taken, compared to publishing each separately. We have indeed had to take a little longer because officials have needed to undertake additional policy work in response to feedback from consultation. I assure my noble friend—and all noble Lords—that we are fully seized of the importance of plastic reduction.

**Lord Dubs (Lab):** My Lords, I do not wish to be discourteous to the Minister, but his answer sounded like a direct quote from “Yes Minister”. Would he like to think about it again? This is intolerable. We have been waiting years to put a charge on plastic bags. We have it on some but not on others. Why can we not just get a move on? Why does it take so long?

**Lord Gardiner of Kimble:** My Lords, that is not quite the case, as with all such things. I am well aware of the sort of responses one is given, but as I said, perhaps the interpretation of “very soon” should be in a glossary of terms. I am very conscious that we need

to take action on this. By the end of this year, many of the larger retailers will not be using single-use plastic bags at all. We are working with all retailers and market traders to address this fully, because we want to get this right.

**Baroness Boycott (CB):** My Lords, 10p seems incredibly cheap for something that can last for 1,000 years before it biodegrades, but why is the consumer bearing all this? What regulations are the Government going to impose on the supermarkets and the food retailers to cut down the amount of packaging they use? It is insane that bananas are wrapped in plastic. I know it is complicated, and to do with how long food lasts, but will the Minister assure me that the Government will undertake proper consultation and then introduce regulation, rather than just responsibility?

**Lord Gardiner of Kimble:** My Lords, the noble Baroness is right that one of the complications is that certain wrapping increases how long produce lasts and stops food waste, so we need to look at these things thoroughly. We also think that those producing the packaging should be responsible for the costs of clearing these matters up—that is what we are consulting on at this very moment. The consultation is important because we need to reduce plastic packaging.

**Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD):** My Lords, there are now many biodegradable carrier bags being used by small retailers who handle food, including butchers. These bags are alleged to degrade in landfill in 12 to 24 months. Surely if these bags are going to landfill, this somewhat defeats the object of the tax. Do the Government plan to extend the 10p tax to biodegradable bags, and are they aware that such bags contain additives to accelerate the degeneration process? Can the Minister assure us that these are not harmful to those who have eaten food that has come into contact with these bags?

**Lord Gardiner of Kimble:** On the last point first, it is important that research is going on, including at EU level, on certain types of degradable plastics—precisely because of chemicals and microplastics. Again, this is not a straightforward matter where we can just press a button and get something resolved. We need to worry about the unintended consequences. A lot of work is going on on these points and I will write to the noble Baroness in some further detail on her first point.

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con):** My Lords, I have been campaigning on the plastics issue now for two years, and progress has been too complex and too slow, for example on bags, as we have heard. Does the Minister expect to be able to announce very soon, with dates, a genuinely single system of waste collection in England and a compulsory system for marking plastic on its recycling characteristics?

**Lord Gardiner of Kimble:** My Lords, a lot of what my noble friend said is involved in the consultation, which closed on 13 May—that is the only precise date I can give—but it is therefore now being considered. We are analysing the responses on consistency of both household and business recycling collections. I know

[LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE]

that one point which my noble friend has constantly raised is on the quality and quantity of the materials collected for recycling. The consultation seeks views on that and one proposal is for all collectors of waste to collect a core set of materials from households and businesses. We want to make it as straightforward as possible for everyone to recycle.

**Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab):** My Lords, the Government really have to get a move on with this. As the noble Baroness, Lady Boycott, said, it is not just about plastic carrier bags. Last year, Theresa May said that by the year 2043—there might have been several new Tory leaders elected by then—the Government aimed to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste. Yet whenever I go to the supermarket and unpack the shopping when I get home, I have far more than one carrier bag's worth of it. In fact, when I take my wheelie bin out on a Thursday night it is almost hard to move it because of the amount of so-called recyclable materials in it. Can the Minister be a little more specific? What proposals are the Government considering now that would, first, reduce the use of single-use plastic but, secondly, task producers with dealing with the environmental impacts of their packaging?

**Lord Gardiner of Kimble:** My Lords, I am very pleased that, like all of us, the noble Baroness is seeking to recycle more. I think we all want to recycle much more. On the extension of the producer responsibility on packaging, she is quite right that too much plastic packaging is produced and that obviously needs to be addressed. On taxation, we have already said that by 2022 there will be a tax on producers who do not use at least 30% recycled material in their products. All this is about a mechanism to reduce the use of plastic packaging and recycle more.

## Carers: Support Question

2.44 pm

Asked by *Baroness Pitkeathley*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what proposals they have to guarantee support for family carers following the cuts made to local authority and voluntary sector support services.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford) (Con):** My Lords, the Government have given councils access to £3.9 billion in dedicated funding for adult social care in 2019-20. Last June, we published the carers' action plan, a cross-government programme of targeted work to support carers, including a £5 million carers' innovation fund to encourage new and creative ways of doing so. We are also working with local government to ensure that carers can access the support that they deserve and promote best practice in carer breaks provision.

**Baroness Pitkeathley (Lab):** I thank the noble Baroness for that Answer, which I listened to with great interest. I am the first to acknowledge that much progress has

been made for carers in recent years, especially winning rights for them under the Carers Act. But I wonder how the noble Baroness would respond to the carer I spoke to on Friday. She is 79, recovering from cancer that has left her with severe back pain and caring for her 91 year-old partner, who has vascular dementia. Fourteen times she has asked her local authority for the assessment, to which she knows she is entitled. Fourteen times she has either been ignored or refused. Her local carers' group, which was a support to her, has closed down because its funding has been cut. "It is no good telling me I have a right to services", she says. "There are no services. There is only me and I am about to go under". How does the noble Baroness respond to her?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** The noble Baroness has raised an important point, which is that we need to provide carers with the support they need, because they do an amazing job. Unpaid care is a vital part of a sustainable health and social care system. This is why the long-term plan has put in place an ambition to ensure that we provide sustainable support across the public health system, and will ensure that we have a quality mark for primary care to highlight best practice. I am very sorry to hear about the experience of the carer in the case that the noble Baroness highlighted and would be pleased to follow this up with her directly, after today's Question Time.

**Baroness Browning (Con):** After decades of being a carer myself, I can say to my noble friend that it would help carers enormously for there to be an integrated approach to the carer and the person they are caring for. I cannot remember how many times I filled in a form asking what my needs are, and wrote across it, in large letters, "If the needs of the person I care for were met, my needs as a carer would be greatly reduced". Until there is that joined-up approach in practice, carers will continue to suffer.

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** As so often, my noble friend speaks with common sense and insight. This is something that our carers innovation fund is supposed to root out, with its creative and innovative ways to drive reform and improvement through the system. That is why we brought it in, but it is also a commitment of the long-term plan. Best-practice quality marks in primary care are supposed to drive better identification and support of carers in the system. We will ensure that we see that.

**Baroness Brinton (LD):** My Lords, 160,000 young carers have been assessed and can get support, but it is thought that there are up to 800,000 young carers. Councils have admitted to the Young Carers Trust that they cannot assess these young people at all. Some of them are doing over 50 hours of caring a week. They know that it is impacting their own physical and mental health. A third of young carers drop out of university and college. What are the Government doing to ensure that the basic funding to provide assessment for these vulnerable young people is in place, and to join up the work between social care and education?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** This is crucial. We must ensure that young carers, who are often unseen in the system, have the support that they need and are not overburdened by caring responsibilities. That is why we have been working with the Carers Trust and the Children's Society. The Children's Society has led a project to identify and disseminate best practice to support and enable young adult carers, between the ages of 16 and 24, to make a positive transition. Guidance and resources have been published this week, and we will ensure that this is implemented effectively. As the noble Baroness rightly says, this is a crucial part of implementing the carers action plan.

**Baroness Royall of Blaisdon (Lab):** My Lords, one group that is desperately in need of support and respite care is the carers of children who are dying. A recent report stated that hospices for children are no longer able to help parents in those categories. They are having to shut down some of their facilities because of lack of investment. What are the Government going to do to help the families who keep these kids going, without whom the whole system will fall apart? The Government must help children's hospices.

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** The noble Baroness is absolutely right. This is an important part of the system. I noted those reports with serious concern. Significant work has been put into providing carers' breaks and respite care within the *Carers Action Plan*. Local authorities are required to provide that support. We shall investigate what has happened in those instances.

**The Countess of Mar (CB):** My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley, made it clear that what is needed is action now, not a long-term plan. What plans do the Government have to help people who are having problems now?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** I am sorry if I have given the impression to the noble Countess that action has not been happening now. I can outline that the Government have been taking ongoing action to support carers. The Care Act 2014 introduced important new rights for carers, putting them on the same footing as those whom they care for. Through the Better Care Fund, the NHS has contributed £130 million for carers' breaks. The *Carers Action Plan*, published in 2018, set out a broad, cross-government programme of work to support carers, which included 64 points which have been delivered since that time. A review will be published in July. A £5 million Carers Innovation Fund to support innovation was announced just this week and will include innovative ways to improve care for patients. This is all ongoing work which is helping carers now, but we recognise that it is not enough, because carers deserve the very best. That is why we will continue to strive to improve support for carers within the system going forward.

**Baroness Thornton (Lab):** My Lords, according to Carers UK, 8.8 million people are carers in this country—that is up 2 million since 2011. Are the Government reviewing the funding provided in last year's *Carers Action Plan* to take account of that? What discussion

is the Minister's department having with the department that funds local government? That is the nub of the problem: austerity has starved local government so that it cannot provide the right kind of care, and carers all over the country are suffering as a result.

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** I thank the noble Baroness for her question. Of course, £10 billion has been provided for adult social care between 2017-18 and 2020, with an extra £240 million for adult social care to reflect winter pressures and an extra £410 million to improve social care for older people, people with disabilities and children. However, the noble Baroness is absolutely right that a sustainable long-term plan for social care is part of the discussions taking place on the spending review and as part of the Green Paper planning. The consideration of dedicated employment rights and reviewing financial support for carers is part of those discussions.

### People with Disabilities: Reporting Abuse Question

2.52 pm

Asked by **Baroness Hussein-Ece**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the adequacy of the support received by people with a disability when they report any form of abuse to appropriate authorities.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford) (Con):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness for her Question. Support for people who wish to make a complaint about health services is available from the independent NHS Complaints Advocacy service. The Ask, Listen, Do programme is aimed at making giving feedback and raising concerns and complaints about education, health and social care easier for children, young people and adults with a learning disability or autism, their families and carers. We will take steps to empower independent mental health advocates to raise concerns when they know that something is not right.

**Baroness Hussein-Ece (LD):** I thank the Minister for her response, but she will be aware that, according to the Crown Prosecution Service, disabled people and those with a learning disability are at a higher risk of crime, particularly hate crime and economic fraud, than the general population. They also experience unequal access to justice and safety.

The Mental Health Foundation last autumn produced a report which highlighted the underreporting of learning disability crimes and hate crime and it made some recommendations. Have the Government taken on board any of the recommendations aimed specifically at government and police; namely, to standardise police reporting systems so as to ensure that learning disability hate crimes are correctly recorded and adjustments made to support the victims when reporting an incident?

This week, the Government launched a task force to tackle economic fraud, but vulnerable people seem not to have been included in it. When will the Government establish good practice that is standardised to include and protect disabled people?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** The noble Baroness has raised a very important issue: she is absolutely right that those with learning disabilities are more at risk from hate crimes and less likely to report those crimes. This is exactly why a number of programmes have been introduced to support those with learning disabilities or autism to raise a complaint, such as the Ask, Listen, Do programme. I am very interested to hear about the report she mentioned: I will take that away in order to learn more about whether its recommendations can be implemented.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (Lab):** My Lords, during consideration of the draft domestic abuse Bill, the Joint Committee heard evidence from disabled groups about abuse in the home, sometimes from family members, sometimes from carers. I hope that the Minister's department will join in consideration of the report of the Joint Committee, which was published last Friday, to ensure that the needs of disabled people with regard to domestic abuse are properly considered and addressed.

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** I am happy to give the noble Baroness that commitment. Domestic abuse in any situation is absolutely unacceptable and we are happy to commit to supporting her.

**Lord Sterling of Plaistow (Con):** My Lords, a reverse of the abuse that the noble Baroness commented on was highlighted at a meeting in this House only two or three weeks ago, when we had a whole load of international psychologists around. A couple were there who said that their son, who is a lawyer but is on the spectrum, had a meltdown one Friday night. He was arrested and stayed in prison until Monday night/Tuesday morning because there was absolutely nobody around who was able to verify that he had this problem. I suggest to the Minister that one of our biggest problems is that there is not enough knowledge, by the police or by others, about how to handle such occasions.

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** I thank my noble friend for raising this matter and I am very sorry about the experience he highlighted. One of the measures that has been implemented in order to improve this situation is liaison services between police and mental health trusts to ensure that expertise is on the ground should individuals find themselves in situations such as he described. This has dramatically reduced the number of such situations. I would be very happy to write to him giving examples of where this has improved the situation.

**The Lord Bishop of Ely:** My Lords, it is important to consider also that there are various ways in which people with disability might be prevented from reporting abuse in the first place. In particular, some people with learning difficulties might not understand or recognise that they are being abused psychologically or financially. Does the Minister agree that information regarding abuse needs to be produced in accessible formats, such as easy read, and should ideally be produced in conjunction with people with disability themselves?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** Absolutely. The right reverend Prelate makes a very sensible, common-sense point: this is exactly why work is going

on between the NHS and the ombudsman to ensure that, within the NHS, there is a sensible and consistent complaints process that is accessible to all who try to make a complaint within the system, no matter their circumstances.

**Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB):** My Lords, I declare my interest as chair of the National Mental Capacity Forum. Do the Government recognise that many people are frightened of reporting any form of abuse, because of recriminations? Even when they do, they are asked for evidence of the abuse and it may be very difficult for them to provide any kind of objective evidence. Therefore, within the whole care sector we need a change in culture: we need staff to learn ways of dealing with some of the most challenging behaviours that they may face, recognising those and differentiating them from other forms of aggression, which may be drug- or alcohol-fuelled, or whatever. That requires investment, so that the CQC and other organisations, in inspecting, will look at the quality of education provided to staff at every level. It is often the lowest-paid staff who need the most education and they cannot access it.

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** As ever, the noble Baroness speaks with experience and wisdom. Speaking up and raising concerns where there has been abuse or where something has gone wrong should be straightforward and met with openness and a desire to get to the bottom of the problem. She is absolutely right that there is often a cultural barrier—a fear of aggression or recrimination. A patient or carer making a complaint should feel that they will be listened to and believed, but a staff member raising a concern should also feel that there are safe avenues for them to do so. That is why we have put in place the national guardian and the “freedom to speak up” guardian. When it comes to carers and patients, that is also why we are working with the ombudsman to ensure that there are clear routes of complaint across the whole NHS so that it is straightforward for people to make complaints and they feel that these avenues are protected for them.

## Children Living in Poverty *Question*

3 pm

*Tabled by Baroness Primarolo*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many children who live in a household where at least one adult is employed are currently living in poverty.

**Baroness Lister of Burtsett (Lab):** On behalf of my noble friend Lady Primarolo, and with her permission, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in her name on the Order Paper.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Baroness Buscombe) (Con):** My Lords, there are 1.7 million children in families where at least one adult is in work in absolute poverty, before housing costs. However, the evidence shows that nearly half of these families are in part-time work or are

self-employed. A child living in a household where every adult is working is about five times less likely to be in relative poverty than a child in a household where nobody works. This shows that work is the best route out of poverty.

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett:** My Lords, I beg to differ that these figures show that work is the best route out of poverty, which is a message that the Government repeatedly tell us. How do they account for the fact that seven in 10 children in poverty have a working parent, up from just over half at the point they first took power? In particular, what assessment have they made of the impact on current and future levels of child poverty of their cuts to in-work benefits and tax credits?

**Baroness Buscombe:** My Lords, the statistics expressed by the noble Baroness do not reflect the £1.7 billion a year cash boost to our welfare system announced in the Budget, which will enable 2.4 million households to keep more of what they earn. We have taken strong action to support working families. The latest rise in the national living wage will increase a full-time worker's annual pay by over £2,750 since 2016. No one wants to see poverty increase. That is why we are doing more to help parents into work and to stay in work through multiple avenues of support from across government.

**Baroness Janke (LD):** My Lords, the Social Metrics Commission found that in 2018 almost a third of children were in poverty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that child poverty has been rising almost entirely in working families. What action will the Government take to ensure that children are not disadvantaged? Will they consider in the comprehensive spending review ending the benefits freeze and the two-child limit?

**Baroness Buscombe:** My Lords, I have already made it clear at this Dispatch Box that we intend to end the benefit freeze next year. Again, the stats produced by the Social Metrics Commission last year predate much of the additional support that we have invested in the system since the last Autumn Budget.

We have done a huge amount to help families through transforming the welfare system so that people are not just helped into work. We are working hard on in-work progression, so that people preferably do not just have a full-time job—three-quarters of all jobs since 2010 are full time—because we want people to have good jobs, and are piloting new ways of supporting that. We are also boosting our capability to work with local businesses and working with jobcentre specialists to encourage local employers to support progression and good-quality flexible working which will support the children of those families in work.

**Baroness Sherlock (Lab):** My Lords, the Minister has talked a lot about what the Government are doing to help people in jobs, but if the aim is to get families out of poverty, it is not working. The facts are clear: people are simply moving from one kind of poverty into another—that is, from out-of-work poverty into in-work poverty. The impact on children is very serious. Did the Minister see the recent research in the *Archives*

*of Disease in Childhood* showing that child poverty has not only risen but will rise further? It looked at the impact on children of being in poverty in childhood and found that those in “persistent poverty” were three times as likely to have mental health problems and twice as likely to have a long-standing illness. The president of the Institute of Child Health said that we need,

“national targets to reduce child poverty backed by a national child poverty strategy, the reversal of cuts to universal credit and the reversal of public health cuts”.

Does the Minister agree?

**Baroness Buscombe:** My Lords, again, we are doing a huge amount, quite a lot of which is not reported or reflected in the additional support we have injected. I have just returned from the G7 in Paris, where we focused on labour. There is no question that, across the world, the changing world of work presents challenges. We are at the forefront on this issue; other countries look to us. Our living wage is way in excess of what other countries afford their citizens. We are setting an example and achieving a huge amount in having a transformational system that helps people into work, pays them to work and gives them in-work progression. Let me give an example: a couple with three children need to work for a total of only 24 hours per week to be exempted from the benefit cap; they can then receive from the state the equivalent of a £35,000 gross salary a year, plus housing support. That is not ungenerous.

**Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con):** My Lords, does the Minister welcome the recent weekly earnings increase?

**Baroness Buscombe:** Absolutely. The increase in weekly earnings makes a huge difference. Tackling poverty will always be a priority for this Government; they have lifted 400,000 people out of absolute poverty since the party opposite was in government. Inequality has fallen. Our reforms have made sure—this is important—that our welfare system encourages people into work, but is also fairer for the taxpayer and sustainable for the future.

## Afghan Interpreters: Security Clearance

### *Private Notice Question*

3.07 pm

Asked by **Baroness Coussins**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will modify and expedite the necessary security clearance for Afghan interpreters formerly employed by UK Armed Forces in Afghanistan and relocated to the UK who have been prevented from securing professional work with NATO forces.

**Baroness Coussins (CB):** My Lords, I beg leave to ask a Question of which I have given private notice.

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Earl Howe) (Con):** My Lords, we are reviewing our national security vetting policies alongside wider work on the Government's

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vetting reform programme. The MoD's review will include an assessment of the criteria applied to interpreters, specifically those deployed in operational theatres.

**Baroness Coussins:** My Lords, surely the loyalty and trustworthiness of these Afghan interpreters has already been tested beyond doubt. The benefit of relocation to the UK under what I agree is a very good redundancy scheme is seriously undermined by reports in Saturday's *Times* that some interpreters have been reduced to taking low-paid work in fast-food outlets instead of the specialist linguistic work for which they are uniquely qualified. Can the Minister confirm that the security clearance criteria of 10 years' residence and five years' British nationality are discretionary? If so, does he agree that there is an overwhelming case for speed, flexibility and generosity so that these interpreters can do the jobs that we must need them to do as much as they want to do them?

**Earl Howe:** My Lords, the Cabinet Office policy contains guidelines for appropriate nationality and UK residency periods for prospective applicants, but they are not absolute requirements and should be considered on a case-by-case basis for each individual. It is important to understand that the process of security clearance is a matter of assessing not simply an individual's trustworthiness but the degree of risk to that individual in the circumstances of the employment that they seek, and the security measures that would be needed to protect that individual and potentially their family as well.

**Lord Tunnicliffe (Lab):** My Lords, the way in which the Government have treated Afghani interpreters is an absolute travesty. During the UK's 13-year mission, they risked their lives in support of our Armed Forces, but have since been forced to work in low-paid jobs as well as struggling to secure security clearance and family visas. It has been reported that vacancies remain for interpreters with NATO forces in Afghanistan, so does the Minister accept that the Government's decision not to speed up the security clearance process has hampered NATO's continuing mission in that country?

**Earl Howe:** My Lords, I hardly accept anything that the noble Lord has just said. I do not believe that the Government's scheme for previously employed interpreters is a travesty. I was glad to hear the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, endorse the quality of the scheme because uniquely in the world it is there to provide for our former staff and their families, who have played such a generous role in supporting UK and NATO staff in Afghanistan. In total, through our *ex gratia* redundancy scheme, around 500 former staff and their families have relocated to the UK, which represents around 1,295 individuals in total. In June last year the then Defence Secretary announced that the criteria had been even more generously expanded. We are the only nation with a dedicated investigation unit in-country to investigate and provide solutions to intimidation.

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD):** My Lords, I regret that I have to speak from these Benches rather than my friend the late Lord Paddy Ashdown, who would

naturally have spoken on this Question and knew so much more than I do. Can the Minister confirm that so far we have accepted, I think he said, some 500 out of a total of 3,500 interpreters that the British had in Afghanistan, while the United States has offered asylum to 9,000 Afghans? It does not seem that the British position is quite so unique. Can he also comment on the fact that the leading candidate for his party leadership is deeply and publicly committed to British forces spending more time in more conflicts east of Suez? If he becomes Prime Minister, it is likely that in future conflicts we will need local interpreters for the languages spoken, so our reputation as regards how we care for interpreters afterwards matters for the future as well as for the past.

**Earl Howe:** I agree, which is why we have been careful to create not only one but at least two very generous schemes for former interpreters. Those schemes do not necessarily involve relocation to the UK. They may involve relocation in-country, they may involve financial compensation, or indeed they may involve retraining for another career altogether, and we provide the means for them to do that. In the majority of cases, I would be very surprised if complaints were raised against the UK, although I take note of the report in the *Times* last week, to which we are paying close attention.

**Lord Cormack (Con):** My Lords, as one who has been privileged to give support to the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, in this very worthwhile campaign, can I put it to my noble friend that we are dealing with some of the bravest of the brave? In the most difficult circumstances they put their own lives at risk, and very often the lives of their families as well. Does he therefore agree that we really must try to deal as expeditiously as security allows with all those whose cases have not yet been adequately dealt with?

**Earl Howe:** Yes, I agree very firmly. The Government remain grateful to all locally employed staff who played pivotal roles in Afghanistan. Many served bravely alongside our military forces on patrol in dangerous situations and we regret deeply that some had to pay the ultimate price for freedom. We use our best endeavours to expedite these assessments as quickly as possible, but my noble friend will understand that sometimes it is important to get to the facts of the case, which does take some time.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op):** My Lords, with respect to the Minister—whom we all respect—this has been dragging on for a very long time. Can he confirm when it was first raised?

**Earl Howe:** The issue raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, was brought to our attention only in the *Times* report. Of course, the wider issue of the packages available to former Afghan interpreters has been long-standing, but I believe the Ministry of Defence has a very good case to present.

**Lord Naseby (Con):** My noble friend must surely realise that it is not as good as it should have been. Can the House expect a Statement within a reasonable

time—a couple of months, say—on exactly what the situation is, otherwise, as was said earlier, our efforts elsewhere in the world will be hampered?

**Earl Howe:** I sympathise with my noble friend's question, but it is important to understand the point I made earlier: it is not easy to make a general statement here, because each case has to be treated individually. As I mentioned, it is often not the person's trustworthiness or nationality that is at issue, but what their degree of vulnerability would be were they to work in the operational theatre they are seeking to be employed in. That is not a question that admits of a standard reply.

**Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (LD):** My Lords, I accept everything the noble Earl has said, but is there not a pragmatic dimension to this? It is one thing to have a scheme, but if the scheme takes a long time to be implemented is that not likely to discourage others from offering their services?

**Earl Howe:** Yes, it may, and the noble Lord is right that that is certainly a risk if it is perceived that the UK is treating anyone unfairly. We are very conscious of that. At the same time, it is not fair on the individual who applies to work—in these cases, for NATO in Afghanistan—to overlook their personal security, that of their families and the measures that would be needed to protect both the individual and their families in those circumstances.

**Lord Pannick (CB):** My Lords, the noble Earl has said on three occasions now that security clearance is a matter of assessing not just the individual's loyalty but their personal safety and that of their family. Can he explain how the individual's personal safety is at greater risk now than when they were in Afghanistan?

**Earl Howe:** My Lords, the threshold for MoD security clearance is as it is because of the intensity of operations and previous security incidents that have occurred in theatre. The protection of our personnel is the highest priority. We are talking not always just about immediate protection from armed force but protection from the risk of coercion and exploitation.

**Baroness Royall of Blaisdon (Lab):** My Lords, does the noble Earl recognise that the interpreters are in a Catch-22 situation? It took them an awfully long time to come to this country because they and their families had to be checked out and were in intense danger. They are in this country now, wanting to move on, to serve this country and NATO and to have a proper job, but they cannot move on with their lives because they and their families are having to be checked out. They are in an invidious situation.

**Earl Howe:** My Lords, obviously I cannot comment on individual cases, but when an Afghan interpreter, for example, is relocated to this country, their nationality should not be any bar to employment in most fields. They would need to be cleared for those jobs but, as I say, their nationality is not normally an issue in those circumstances.

## Sentencing (Pre-consolidation Amendments) Bill [HL] *Second Reading*

3.18 pm

*Moved by Lord Keen of Elie*

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Considered in Second Reading Committee on 12 June.*

*Bill read a second time and committed to a Special Public Bill Committee.*

## Global Gender Equality *Motion to Take Note*

3.19 pm

*Moved by Baroness Sugg*

That this House takes note of the Women Deliver conference held in Vancouver in June, and the role the United Kingdom plays internationally in promoting global gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Baroness Sugg) (Con):** My Lords, it was with great pride that I led the United Kingdom delegation to the recent Women Deliver conference, which was hosted this year by the Government of Canada in Vancouver from 3 to 6 June. Women Deliver is a major gathering of more than 8,000 people to consider and promote women's rights and gender equality across the world. It is an important moment to celebrate success, renew commitments and strategise for the future. The UK delegation was warmly welcomed and praised for our continued commitment to these critical issues, and the role that we are playing in helping the world reach global goal 5 on gender equality.

Never has this work felt more urgent. We are witnessing an increasingly organised global roll-back of women's rights. For example, language on sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence was not included in recent UN Security Council Resolution 2467, which the UK deeply regrets. The UK's support is seen as vital in this space through the significant funding we provide and through our voice on the world stage.

Women Deliver was organised around the theme of power—individual power, addressing structural power and recognising the power of movements. These themes are all covered by DfID's 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality and at the conference I outlined how we are harnessing these different forms of power.

First, I made it clear that we will continue to support and build the individual power of girls and women across the countries and communities that we support. Through UK aid, we are working to ensure that all girls and women are provided with the education, sexual and reproductive health services and economic tools to help them reach their potential.

Secondly, I acknowledged the importance of structural power and tackling the barriers and discrimination that keep too many women and girls from reaching their potential. Nowhere is this more important than

[BARONESS SUGG]

in our work to prevent violence against women and girls. Thanks to the ground-breaking findings from our What Works to Prevent Violence programme, presented at Women Deliver, we know that violence is preventable. We must now work together to scale proven interventions to prevent violence against women and girls in all its forms. At Women Deliver, I announced a new £12 million programme in Zimbabwe that will work with communities to tackle the drivers of violence and provide survivors of violence with the services that they so desperately need.

Lastly, I outlined that we know that we can create lasting and truly transformational change only when we harness the power of movements. There is evidence of increased state targeting of women human rights defenders, and of growing restrictions on women's rights organisations. I was inspired by the women leaders and activists whom I met who are fighting the roll-back at local level and delivering change in their communities with funding from DfID.

I spent some time speaking with three FGM activists who have been supported through Amplify Change, an organisation partly funded by DfID. They explained how they were able to achieve real progress on the ground, through using their contacts and direct knowledge to influence and slowly change behaviour within their own communities. One inspiring woman had had supported 28 communities to take collective action to end infantile FGM—and she was not stopping there.

It was clear from all my conversations that we need to do more to support women's rights organisations and activists to push for change and hold their own Governments and societies to account. I was pleased to announce that DfID is supporting the Women Deliver Advocacy Academy to provide intense, hands-on training for grass-roots activists from around the world on critical projects. This is particularly important in crisis settings, where women are too often seen as victims rather than as powerful agents of change. As donors, we need to work with women leaders and women's rights organisations. I delivered closing remarks to the Humanitarian Pre-Conference at Women Deliver, where I made clear our position on the need to increase support to women-led organisations in humanitarian crises.

Women Deliver was a vital moment to make the UK's long-term, progressive position on sexual and reproductive health and rights crystal clear. We support SRHR because it saves and transforms lives. For instance, through the FP2020 global partnership, we have contributed to nearly 50 million more women in the world's poorest countries taking up modern contraception since 2012. We fund SRHR programmes, including on family planning and maternal and newborn healthcare, in 18 countries.

At Women Deliver, we hosted a flagship side event focusing on rights, power and women's bodies. We gave a platform to activists and experts working on traditionally taboo topics, from menstruation to trans rights, violence and abortion. Through this event we outlined DfID support for the Guttmacher-Lancet definition of SRHR, which expands on the language agreed at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, underpinning a truly comprehensive

approach. I was also pleased to announce an uplift to our programme with the Guttmacher Institute, bringing our current support to £13.6 million.

There is no doubt that we are facing uncertain times in the fight for women's rights. There are people around the world who want to control women, restrict their choices and deny them their rights—but, at the same time, we are also seeing women and men rising up to defend these rights and questioning the injustices that they have tolerated for decades. Women Deliver was a true testament to the solidarity of the women's rights movement.

Through UK aid and our presence on the world stage, we will continue to advance gender equality, protect sexual and reproductive health and rights and stand with the most marginalised women and girls to ensure that truly no one is left behind. I beg to move.

3.25 pm

**Baroness Hussein-Ece (LD):** My Lords, I thank the Minister for securing this debate and introducing it in such a positive way. It was a pleasure to attend the Women Deliver global conference a week ago as a parliamentary delegate of the European parliamentary forum for sexual and reproductive rights. I declare an interest as vice-chair of the APPG on Population, Development and Reproductive Health.

Our aim as a forum is to remove restrictions on access to contraceptives and to improve policy on maternal health, child rights, access to education, vaccinations, addressing sexual violence and child marriage, as the Minister outlined. More than 8,000 delegates from 145 countries came together in Vancouver in a strong, positive spirit of pushing forward on the enormous progress that has been made over the past decade and reflecting on how we take that forward. It was a great pleasure to see the Minister there addressing the parliamentary forum and pledging ongoing support and commitment to women's reproductive and health rights. I know her announcements were very welcome.

It was also wonderful to hear the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau opening the conference and underlining Canada's commitment to addressing sexism, misogyny and equality for women. Those were his words. He is a Liberal Prime Minister who has a gender-balanced Cabinet and has put women's rights globally at the centre of his policies. He announced a \$1.4 billion increase in spending on women's health globally each year. He said he is a proud feminist walking the walk. We could do with him here.

The Women Deliver conference this year focused on power and how it can drive or hinder progress and change. We know that at the heart of gender equality lies the right to power over oneself and one's future. There were calls for structural change and a more power-balanced and equal world. At the heart of global movements for progress lies the power of many and the power of change.

It is now accepted that the empowerment of girls and women benefits everyone. Education for girls benefits whole communities and societies. It can transform lives, change the world and power real, sustainable progress. From the #MeToo movement, to young

people campaigning for greater equality from those in power, to mainstream gender equality, we have seen incredible shifts in progress. There were so many younger, inspirational women there, which was very exciting. They are working on the ground at the coalface of some of the projects around the world. They have higher expectations. They are not simply grateful for or satisfied with the progress that has been made. They want more. They want women's rights to become universal rights.

We have heard that there is a backlash in some countries, particularly in America, to restrict women's reproductive rights and their right to have control over their own bodies. There was a strong sense that we must face them down and redouble our efforts and energies to ensure that the tides of regressive politics do not prevail. How many of us have heard the phrase in connection with women's rights, "It's gone too far", even from some quarters in our own country? I have heard it a lot. Really? What does it mean? The director of the UNFPA has asked how it is possible, in this day and age, that 800 women die in childbirth every day. Why should we tolerate laws to resist women's rights in the face of these appalling statistics? We cannot point to any laws that take away rights from men in these countries, so why should we tolerate it for women?

The Listening Tour was a very good initiative undertaken by the organisers of the Women Deliver conference. It reached an unprecedented level of engagement, with over 1,300 surveys completed by over 75 international organisations and hundreds of individuals. One key theme—it is one that I heard constantly—was that sexual and reproductive health and rights are now under threat and that the global political climate becoming ever more precarious is having a troubling and chilling effect on women's rights. Although some recent gains have been made, sexual and reproductive health and rights, including the right to safe abortion, are under threat in many places.

We heard from an MP from El Salvador, where abortion is illegal, that 17 young women are currently in prison because they had either a termination or, as some of them claim, a miscarriage. In March this year, El Salvador's Supreme Court commuted the 30-year sentences of three women imprisoned for abortion convictions, lessening their punishment to time served and ordering them to be released immediately. The three women had spent 10 years in prison on aggravated homicide charges for allegedly having abortions. They claimed that they had had miscarriages. The court found that the women were victims of social and economic circumstances and ruled that the original sentences were unreasonable. These women did not become pregnant on their own, but it is the women who suffer in these poor and disadvantaged circumstances. It really is shocking and disgraceful.

Many delegates also found that pervasive inequalities and a lack of access to data and technology are stalling progress. Damaging gender norms are perpetuating harmful practices such as FGM, as has been mentioned, child marriage and other forms of violence against girls and women. Often male-dominated parliaments will rail against those things but do little to encourage or actively promote women's involvement in their

respective legislatures. Some Prime Ministers and Presidents of various countries who were present at the conference were challenged about why they were not doing more to get women into their parliaments. I think that Justin Trudeau challenged a couple of Presidents, saying, "If we can do it, why can't you?"

We already know that, as a result of both biological and gender-related differences, there can be a significant impact on health depending on whether you are a man or a woman. The World Health Organization, which had a very strong presence at the conference, has stated very clearly:

"The health of women and girls is of particular concern because, in many societies, they are disadvantaged by discrimination rooted in sociocultural factors".

I heard from a young woman in a session that I was involved in on menstruation. She said that she faced extraordinary disadvantage and discrimination once she started menstruating. No sanitary products are available or affordable and, as a result, many girls are forced to drop out of school each month, and then eventually they drop out of education altogether. That is before the stigma they face in some countries from their own family, like the girl I have just mentioned, who was from Nepal. She told me that she had to stay in an outhouse while she was menstruating and was not allowed to look at her father.

Some of the sociocultural factors that prevent women and girls benefiting from quality health services and attaining the best possible level of health include inequality, ridiculous stigmas and taboos, and power relationships between men and women. As I mentioned, there was a sense of a new generation who have a far greater understanding and are better informed about what is going on in the world. They want more information and more connectivity, a drive to achieve greater equality and human rights, and an acknowledgement that women's rights are human rights. There were calls for more empowerment and representation of women and minority and LGBT+ communities. There was a very strong feeling that women's rights are not an add-on; they must be mainstreamed and embedded.

Perhaps one of the most important issues to come out of this conference, which I think everyone signed up to, is that men and boys are key to achieving gender equality. With one notable exception, the Members on the list of speakers today are all women. More men are needed globally to sign up to this. It is so important. We know that we need men to step up and work alongside the majority of women tackling this agenda. Gender equality is not a women's issue; it is a societal issue and everyone must be involved if we are to reach a more equal world.

As the Minister has already mentioned, there has been such alarm about what has been going on in some of the larger donor countries. Will she provide a commitment that there will be no rolling back on women's reproductive rights? I would also like to ask a domestic question—we need to lead by example—about last week's statistics showing that more than 1,000 women had travelled to the United Kingdom from Northern Ireland for an abortion because it is illegal there. Despite an NHS abortion being free for Northern Irish women, their having to travel outside Northern Ireland to get access to safe healthcare when they are a

[BARONESS HUSSEIN-ECE]

part of our United Kingdom is not a position that an equal society should be advocating or tolerating. How can we justify a two-tier system for our own female population?

3.35 pm

**Baroness Flather (CB):** My Lords, I was not at the conference; I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Hussein-Ece, for the good, clear picture she has given of what went on there and I thank her for that. I was also going to congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Giddens, on putting his name down to speak, but sadly he has scratched. It is absolutely right that men should participate in this issue. Women cannot do this by themselves; it is not possible. Society is made up of men and women and we need both to work towards a more equal society; otherwise, we will forever be saying, "We wish, we wish".

There are countries where women play no part in the economy or in society as a whole. We sit here in this wonderful Chamber with wonderful people and forget how terrible women's lives can be. I speak particularly about India, which is my country of origin. Women in India are mostly treated as worthless—not even whole, maybe half—human beings. When convenient, they can be discarded; when it suits someone, they can be burned to death. Anything can be done to women in India. Rapes are so commonplace, especially in the north of the country. It is amazing how many women get raped in north India; Delhi is very bad. Of course they can go to the police, but the person has to be found. That requires a real commitment to doing something, and there is no such commitment. Ultimately, we have to accept that there is no commitment by countries such as India to look after women.

The present Prime Minister decided in his previous term that women should have proper toilets. He made a rule that a lot of toilets should be built—not in schools, of course, which was difficult for girls, but apart from that a lot of toilets were to be built in villages and so on. I came back from India in February and what did I hear? A lot of these toilets do not have water; a lot of the materials used were discarded materials, broken toilets and other bits and pieces that made it look as though the job had been done. This is very common in India: contractors who are given a contract will do a job in such a way that most of the money goes into their pockets and nothing really improves. Unless somebody makes sure that the work is done properly to provide them, women will not have toilets; it will be just words. If they cannot use them, they do not have them. It is very upsetting to me to notice how many things that are supposed to be done are in fact not. The constitution of India gives equality to women but in reality they have never had it, and gives equality to people of all castes but they have never had it either, and it looks very unlikely that that will happen in most of our lifetimes; I have very little left, but there are quite a few people here with longer lifetimes left. What is the point of laws if they are not enforced or a constitution if it is not followed?

How do you change the life of a poor woman in India? My personal view is that there is only one way and that is by giving her access to paid work, even a

small amount—a small amount of pay, that is; the work may be whatever. If she earns even a little bit of money, that changes her position in the household. Please do not forget that it is not only society that does not value her; her family do not value her either. She is the one who has to do all the work and provide for other people in the family, not to mention the husband, who probably gets drunk every Friday—Saturday, sorry; we do not have a Friday holiday—and beats her up. Most women in the big metropolises, not so much in Delhi but particularly in Mumbai, who are not educated but are quite intelligent are working in the informal sector. They cook and clean as well as doing a small amount of such things as nail polishing and massage, and they earn money. But what happens to that money is that the husbands take it away from them, and a lot of the men stop working when their wives start earning.

The other side of the coin is that there are many families in which, if a woman earns something, her position changes in the household and she becomes a person instead of being just a body in the house. To my way of thinking, our Government should focus a bit more on small-scale co-operatives or organisations that provide small-scale work for women. If you do that, you change those women as well as other people's view of them. The most important issue is how people view women in a country such as India; they are not viewed as capable, or as able to do things or be someone. If they start earning money, that changes everyone's minds. We all know that. Many of your Lordships have probably been to projects and seen how the women change once they are earning money.

However, that is not happening because the big companies and corporations do not employ women. Even if the job is to run a cafeteria or do the cleaning in the office, it will be men doing it. Everything is done by the men, not the women, and I do not know how we can change that. Perhaps we could ask our Government to focus more on bringing about the capacity for women to earn something, because that would change their lives and those of their families. They say that men spend only 35% of their wages on their families. Imagine how much they spend on themselves.

There are issues that need to be looked at. Unless men join in this battle, change will not happen. Village councils have quotas for the number of women. Some of those councils have women presidents or chairmen. Who are they? They are probably the mothers of the worst thugs in the area or the wives of the richest men. We need the women to do whatever they are going to do because they can do it. We do not need women to be put forward by their menfolk, which is quite common in a country such as India. If you go further north to a part of India called Haryana, which is the richest state and where earnings and income are very high, that is the worst for women. On a Channel 4 programme, I saw that a girl and a boy had been hanged in the house by their parents, because they married without their consent. It is very depressing to hear that these things are happening.

My last point relates to the protection of women in conflict situations. Nobody protects women in conflict situations and now the United States has introduced a strong ban on any kind of abortion. Even if a woman is raped 10 times in a conflict situation and becomes

pregnant, she is not allowed to have an abortion. If she does, the organisation which carries out that abortion will not get any US aid. I once wrote a letter to the ambassador, saying, “What if it was somebody you knew? What if it was somebody from your family?”. All women are women. They should be treated as if they are members of a man’s family, but they are not—perhaps because these men do not even treat their own families well. It is very worrying that the United States has introduced such a strong ban on abortions, even in conflict situations.

There are a lot of battles to be fought. I do not know whether they will be fought, or whether they will be won. We all keep trying in our own way. I have set up a registered charity called Women Matter, which focuses on getting women into paid work. We all try, in our own way, to do whatever we can. I think all noble Lords here would agree with that, but it is a big job.

3.46 pm

**Baroness Helic (Con):** My Lords, I declare an interest as per the register. I start by congratulating my noble friend the Minister on her appointment and wishing her every success in all the work ahead of her. I know that, armed with her commitment, she will make a difference. I also thank her predecessor, my noble friend Lord Bates, for his dedication to improving the lives of those who do not have the fortune to live in a safe, secure and democratic country.

This is a crucially important debate. I can hardly remember a time when there has been such a sustained disregard for human rights, particularly women’s rights. It is concerning that some of those attacks are arising in not just the usual suspects of authoritarian countries but Europe and the United States. I am sure my noble friend shares my dismay at seeing the United States contribute directly to a weakening of language on sexual and reproductive health rights in a number of UN bodies, including the recent UN Security Council resolution championed by Germany on sexual violence in conflict.

As my noble friend said, we are witnessing a global rollback of women’s rights, and gender equality is facing uncertain times. The United Kingdom’s leadership on women’s rights, women, peace and security, and sexual violence in conflict is more important than ever. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the staff of the Department for International Development for their contribution to development and the rights of women worldwide. It is yet another reminder of how fortunate we are in this country to have the Civil Service that we do.

Equality and rights for women begin at home. Sheer logic dictates that we cannot speak up effectively for women in countries such as Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iran or Saudi Arabia if our own house is not in order. I therefore hope that my noble friend can give us some assurance that the Istanbul convention will soon be ratified and fully integrated into our law. The convention is the most comprehensive legal framework that exists to address violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, FGM, honour violence and forced marriage. I think noble Lords on all sides would agree that our ratification is well overdue.

I welcome the work that has been done at the Department for International Development, the achievements that have been made in meeting the SDGs and the Government’s strategic vision for gender equality. I also recognise that the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recently concluded that violence against women and girls is,

“competing with a broader range of priorities”,

than before, and that DfID’s work has been “moving slowly”. I will therefore focus my remarks on two areas where I believe that the United Kingdom can show significant leadership that would help to accelerate progress and to set an example to other countries. Both relate to the international review conference on sexual violence in conflict, which the Government are hosting in November as part of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. The conference is a unique opportunity to reboot the UK’s leadership on the PSVI, and on the women, peace and security agenda as a whole.

Daesh’s use of rape and sexual slavery as a genocidal strategy towards the Yazidi people, and the brutal sexual violence carried out in Syria, Iraq, Burma and most recently Sudan, to take just a few examples, demonstrate that the case for action is even more urgent today than in 2012 when the PSVI began. It also shows that impunity for the use of rape as a weapon of war and terror is still the norm. My first proposal therefore concerns the urgent need to strengthen the international community’s ability to hold perpetrators of war-zone rape to account. Part of the current problem is the willingness of some Security Council members to shield perpetrators of mass rape and other war crimes, as Russia and China have done in the case of Syria and Myanmar, through the use, or threat of use, of their Security Council veto. This creates the risk of significant delay in holding alleged war criminals to account.

The other significant obstacle is a lack of reliable evidence of sexual crimes that can stand up in court, which has contributed to the difficulty of ensuring successful prosecutions for the use of rape as a weapon of war. A further problem has emerged, as in the case of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, which is the proliferation of informal efforts to gather evidence of rape and related crimes. This has led to reported instances of survivors being interviewed multiple times—on some occasions 25 times—and evidence being damaged in a legal sense.

To address these issues, I endorse a proposal from my noble friend Lord Hague and the special envoy to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Angelina Jolie, that the UK champions the creation of a permanent international investigatory body on sexual and gender-based violence. This would have the mandate and resources to gather and preserve evidence and prepare case files for international or national prosecutions so that, whenever an ICC referral, ad hoc tribunal or local prosecution can take place, the evidence is ready.

Those who commission, condone and carry out sexual violence as a strategy of war rely on the assumption that they will get away with these crimes—that their victims will be too intimidated and ashamed to speak, that the evidence will be lost, and that they can sit out the international community, which lacks the will to

[BARONESS HELIC]

hold perpetrators of this horrendous crime to account. A permanent investigatory body is an essential part of beginning to shatter each of these assumptions and to start to end impunity for conflict-related sexual violence. I hope that my noble friend the Minister can give her support to this objective.

This is a prime example of where prevention and deterrence are infinitely preferable to dealing with the consequences of a crime, not only for the lives of the survivors, but for all our efforts in the sphere of international development, which are significantly undermined by sexual and gender-based violence. I hope the Government will use the opportunity presented by the November conference to announce their commitment to seeking the creation of this body, along with a group of like-minded countries.

Secondly, as my noble friend the Minister will know, gender-based violence is a persistently underfunded aspect of international humanitarian relief and development programmes. Gender-based violence, already widespread in times of peace, is exacerbated during conflict and other humanitarian crises and continues to be one of the most pervasive human rights violations. Evidence suggests that approximately one in five displaced or refugee women is subjected to sexual violence. Girls under the age of 18 in particular, but also boys in this group, often make up the majority of survivors. Yet sexual and gender-based violence is not prioritised by donors, and funding is often inadequate to the scale of the problem.

Allocations for sexual gender-based violence funding were just 0.12% of total humanitarian funding from 2016 to 2018. That is \$51.7 million, from a total of \$41.5 billion. Research by the International Rescue Committee suggests that, for the same period, two-thirds of funding requests for gender-based violence in emergencies were not met, leaving a gap of over \$100 million. The UN's last report on conflict-related sexual violence identified 19 countries where verifiable incidents of sexual violence took place, and specifically highlighted the funding problem.

The shortfalls in funding have an impact on the ground for survivors. For example, the 2016 UN humanitarian response plan noted that 28,000 reports of sexual violence had been officially recorded in the Central African Republic, and requested \$28 million for gender-based violence programs. In response, only \$1 million was committed by donors, according to the International Rescue Committee. The same goes for the situation in Lebanon and the DRC. The international community needs to close this funding gap, strengthen protection measures and increase access to life-saving services, including sexual and reproductive health services.

The UK could set a lead by dedicating a fixed or minimum percentage of its aid budget to fighting sexual and gender-based violence. I hope that the International Development Secretary uses the opportunity of the November PSVI summit to announce that the UK will devote at least 1% of its budget to addressing this. The UK has an opportunity to lead the way and set a global standard that other international donors could then follow. It would demonstrate long-term commitment, and help improve transparency on UK spending to support women and girls—which has

been publicly stated as a top policy commitment for the Government. It would allow NGOs and civil society organisations to plan and deliver effective long-term support to communities and survivors of sexual violence, and, by ensuring continuity of funding, it would help to bridge the divide between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts.

This could be a signature moment for UK leadership, which has already led the way internationally on PSVI, girls' education, family planning and FGM. It would be a natural next step for our country to take, to defend and support women and girls who have been the victims of sexual and gender-based violence in the world's poorest and most fragile countries.

Violence against women is a major barrier to achieving gender equality. It is rooted in discrimination and harmful social norms and stereotypes. Far too often, our response focusses on help for survivors after the event. However, we know that the best way to end violence against women and girls is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Therefore, I hope that the Government will consider these two proposals, alongside the many other actions that they are taking. We have an opportunity to send a signal to the rest of the world that the UK will not only defend progress made on women's rights in previous decades but also show the leadership and political will needed to help achieve new progress in the years to come.

3.57 pm

**Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab):** My Lords, although like others I note that we are predominantly ladies in this debate—with the honourable exception of my noble friend Lord McConnell—I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, on securing this opportunity to reflect on the recent Women Deliver conference, so soon after it took place earlier this month. This is indeed a welcome chance to note the role that the UK is playing in promoting global gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Women Deliver is the world's largest conference on gender equality and women's rights, health and well-being. This year, the 7,000 attendees and speakers, from some 165 countries, included everyone from the noble Baroness herself to Melinda Gates and the #MeToo movement's Tarana Burke, from the Canadian Prime Minister to the President of Ethiopia, not to mention hundreds of campaigners, government officials, civil society and youth leaders, academics, activists and journalists. However, I was concerned to hear that many invitees from African countries, including Ethiopia, had their visas denied, with little explanation. This is really disappointing, especially given how crucial it is that the global fight for women's rights and equality involves partners from across the world. Some of the greatest challenges for women's rights are in the developing world, and we must work with the leaders of these states if we are to realise our goals of gender parity. As the UK will be hosting a global summit to end sexual violence here in November, can the Minister confirm that this conference will involve representatives from across the world?

To date, the UK has a good track record on advocating gender equality and empowerment for women and girls on the international stage. In the Minister's address

to the conference, I was particularly pleased to hear her give her commitment to the UK continuing that work. We have taken great steps in support of the United Nations' 17 sustainable development goals, as outlined in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. It is absolutely right that the UK continues to deliver on its commitment to SDG 5, the much lobbied-for goal entirely dedicated to gender parity, which challenges the world to:

“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, by 2030.

The UK's continuing commitment to this goal is particularly important when we look at what is happening elsewhere today. As the Minister has observed, the world is witnessing a global roll-back of women's rights. Campaigns to undo women's hard-won victories are gaining traction; I think of course of the recent rulings in Alabama and Missouri on abortion rights in the US. The US position on sexual and reproductive health and rights is deeply worrying. Earlier this year, these rights were excluded from a UN resolution on combating rape in conflict, after pressure from the US on the grounds that such language implies support for abortions. Watering down the text in this way has gone against years of gains for women's rights in situations of armed conflict. My party has pledged to provide political leadership globally where women's rights are under attack, championing women's sexual and reproductive health rights and mitigating the impact of US-led funding cuts. Will the Minister outline what recent representations the Government have made to our US ally over women's rights?

I am thinking of the recent *Crisis In Care* report from the International Women's Health Coalition, which noted that since the US Administration announced that any foreign charity receiving US funding would be prohibited from promoting or performing abortions, an organisation in Kenya which focused on maternal and newborn health has been forced to terminate programmes after refusing to sign this rule. Can the Minister tell us what representations have been made to the US Administration over this policy, which is now leading to the denial of aid to some of the world's most vulnerable?

As the Women Deliver conference heard, the UK has long been recognised as a global leader on gender equality. Our initiatives have meant that girls and women across the world are leading safer, healthier lives. By backing Africa-led work to end female genital mutilation, challenging child marriage, upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights, and helping girls to get a good education, we have helped to give women and girls the opportunity to fulfil their potential. But I am concerned that the UK, too, may be rolling back on this commitment as it focuses more on its trade and economic development work. In May last year, the Government published an update on the UK's key targets for the SDGs. As we see, there is no room for complacency over any past gains made in these areas. The findings of a new global index measuring efforts to end gender inequality were published last week in Vancouver. They show that with 11 years to go, no country is on track to reach the 2030 target on gender equality.

The SDG gender index developed by the Equal Measures 2030 partnership measured progress on 51 targets in 14 of the sustainable development goals. The average overall score for the 129 countries in the index, home to 95% of the world's women and girls, was 65.7 out of 100. This is firmly in the “must do better” category; the findings show that nearly 40% of the world's women and girls—1.4 billion—currently live in countries that are not doing enough to improve women's lives. Only a fraction of total aid by OECD donors—0.1%—is committed to women's organisations, and only 0.02% to women's organisations based in developing countries. Given the vital role of women's groups in tackling gender inequality, can the Minister tell us what steps her department is taking to increase the funding for these organisations?

4.04 pm

**Baroness Tonge (Non-Affl):** My Lords—or, I should say, mostly noble Baronesses—I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate, because I was at the Women Deliver conference in Vancouver. In fact, it was the fourth Women Deliver conference I have attended over the years, and they are getting bigger. As you have heard, there were over 8,000 people this time. I declare an interest, too, as chair of the All-Party Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health.

Among the many hundreds of meetings one could go to, one stood out for me. It made a change from the usual diet of women's reproductive health issues, which I will come to later. At an absolutely packed meeting, I heard a report called the *State of the World's Fathers*. It was given by an organisation called Promundo, which I know, and is leading a global campaign called MenCare to promote the involvement of men and boys in childcare and domestic duties. I chaired a meeting in the House for its first report four years ago, and again last week for this recent report. By the way, I am sorry that only one male Member of this House is speaking, but I guess every other male noble Lord will read the debate tomorrow evening while their wife prepares the dinner, clears up afterwards, gets ready for bed and sets the breakfast. I am sure that is true.

I am not entirely joking, because the report points out that women do most of the work in the home, regardless of their other duties. To achieve a 50:50 balance, it is calculated that men need to do 50 minutes of housework and childcare every day, if they are to be fair to their partners. Of course, many men do help with caring and housework—please do not get me wrong—particularly in some societies. But I vividly remember my first trip with the International Development Committee, which was to Uganda. We were taken to a village right out in the sticks, where the women had prepared a presentation of drawings and speeches to tell us what their day was like. It was amusing as well as informative, and their day consisted of getting up very early in the morning to fetch the water from some distance; cleaning the yard; making a meal before getting the children off to school; waking their husbands and feeding same; working in the fields until dark; preparing dinner; clearing and settling children; and serving dinner to the men, who had been sitting under the trees all day. They had drawn a lovely picture of

[BARONESS TONGE]

that. The men, we were told, were discussing important matters and had to do this most days. It was a regular day for the subsistence farmer families in Uganda at that time.

I quote from the *State of the World's Fathers* report:

“Globally, women spend significantly more time than men—sometimes up to ten times as much—on unpaid care ... and domestic work. If this is calculated on the basis of an hourly minimum wage, it could make up 9 to 11 percent of global ... GDP”.

This rather amused me in the report:

“In 2018, 606 million women of working age”—

I do not know if all 606 million were personally interviewed, but it got the figure from somewhere—

“around the world said that they were unable to take on paid work because of unpaid”,

domestic “responsibilities”. That rings true to many of us. It continues:

“In countries where women spend twice as much time as men on unpaid care, their average earnings”,

when they do outside work,

“are less than two-thirds of men’s... This disparity lies at the heart of gender inequality; it keeps women, families, communities, countries, and the world poor”.

The women in Uganda expressed very forcefully how hard women work. In many ways though, they are not that different from many women in developed countries, who work all day outside the home, but are still responsible for all the childcare, domestic work and shopping arrangements. Added to that, they still do not get equal pay for the work they do.

The World Economic Forum has said that a country’s GNP improves substantially if women are encouraged to work outside the home. Our Government encourage mothers to work outside the home, but—and it is a big “but”—if they are to do this, and many do, better facilities must be provided for childcare. In this country, they are still woefully inadequate, and partners must do more to help.

Policy changes suggested in the report are better education for boys on home responsibilities and childcare—that is creeping into our schools; talking to my grandchildren, I think that it is beginning to happen—and not just equal pay for equal work but equal fully paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents. That is central to setting the foundation for fathers’ involvement with their children from an early age.

This is all very well and one hopes that it is starting to happen, but there can never be liberation and true empowerment of women until they have power over their own bodies—that is my favourite sentence. This means, of course—my favourite subject, too—that they must have access to affordable or free family planning and safe abortion, so that they can choose how many children to have and not just be breeding machines until they die of exhaustion. I know that this Government and the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, are committed to this subject, but perhaps she could tell us just how committed they are in changing circumstances.

In this country—I know that it is not the Minister’s responsibility, but it is that of her Government—family planning services are rapidly disappearing as council budgets are cut and women either have to travel long

distances to find a specialist service or go to their GP, who in many cases prescribes only the pill and gives them little choice over what method to use. I note that abortion rates in older women are rising, which could be due to such lack of provision. I hope that she can comment on this.

On international development, will funding to NGOs providing sexual and reproductive health services be provided in coming years? They were not last year, because there was a different system, so there is a big gap to fill worldwide in those services since President Trump reintroduced the gag rule—we have heard about that already; I do not need to explain it. That affects all NGOs providing sexual and reproductive health services whether or not they include abortion.

How will the Government maintain their fine reputation in this field? To do so means constantly repeating the policy on abortion after rape in conflict, which should be provided under international humanitarian law whether or not the national law of the country concerned allows it. Will the Government confirm that they will stick to 0.7% of GNP being spent on international development, of which 10% should be on sexual and reproductive health?

I congratulate the Government—it is hard for me to congratulate a Tory Government—on what they have done so far for women’s rights, and women’s reproductive rights particularly, worldwide. I trust that they will try even harder in the future.

4.13 pm

**Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab):** My Lords, when visiting areas affected by conflict over the years, whether in the southern Philippines, northern Nigeria, the DRC, the Central African Republic, Myanmar or many other places, two significant trends struck me as unavoidable. The first is that, increasingly, conflicts around the world are internal and based on identity. They have at their core a dispute between people of different identities, where historically one of which, at least, has faced discrimination, disadvantage and violence over the years. The second is that the people who come off worst in these conflicts, again and again, are the women and girls. You do not have to be there very long, visit very often or even visit more than once to recall the haunted look on the faces of women who have been attacked by combatants despite the fact that they themselves and their girls, and their boy children as well, have never been involved in that conflict.

That is why this debate is so important. I congratulate the Minister not only on securing the debate today but on the way in which she has embraced her new brief since taking over from her predecessor—who was certainly a hard act to follow, I am sure—and more particularly for what she said in opening the debate and the way in which she described our interventions, as a country, at the Women Deliver conference in Vancouver. If we are indeed to put power at the heart of our policy in this area, in any of the three areas she described—the individual power of women, through better education; the structural power, tackling the issues of violence and discrimination; or the power of movements to defend and expand rights—that is exactly the right place for us to be locating our international policy in this area, and I welcome that very much.

I also very much welcome the speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, and strongly endorse the two proposals she made for the conference in November. It is absolutely right to say that we have to tackle the growing international culture of impunity and we need a structural way in which to do that—not just hoping for cultural change in the Security Council or anywhere else. She is absolutely right to call for increased funding for the survivors of sexual violence in conflict and the rebuilding of their lives.

I have just returned from northern Iraq—in fact I read about the Women Deliver conference when I was there. I was there at exactly the same time and in Duhok, Mosul and Irbil in northern Iraq I visited several internally displaced persons camps and refugee camps and spoke to a number of agencies and local officials. I was struck by two things yet again. The first was the crucial importance of education. Mosul is a historic city destroyed by Islamic State and the conflict that led to the liberation, we hope, of the city 18 months ago. Today there are nearly 2,000 schools open again in Mosul; children are studying in school holiday periods to catch up on the years of education that they lost under Islamic State rule in that city, and there is hope again in their hearts and minds. Yet only two hours away, in Irbil, there are thousands of children, both refugees from Syria and displaced children and families from Mosul and elsewhere, living in IDP camps and sharing one small school between 12,000 people. There are thousands of children working in shifts to try and get some education at some point during the week. In fact, I met a group of teenage girls who had not been in school for three years: they were not allowed to attend the school in the IDP camp because they had missed out and dropped back a couple of grades. We hope that they will be able to rectify that.

The issue of education is crucial. Seeing the hope on one hand of these schools reopening in Mosul and the despair of the children stuck for years in these camps in Irbil reinforced for me the importance not just of education for refugees but education for girls and indeed boys who have been internally displaced, of whom there are almost twice as many worldwide as there are refugees. My most telling visits were to the Yazidi families in the camps in Duhok. There are still 300,000 Yazidis displaced in Duhok. They are terrified to go home to their historic lands in Sinjar and their numbers are being added to regularly now with the survivors of kidnapping and sex slavery coming back to the families in the hope that they can at some point perhaps rebuild their lives.

I believe very strongly that we in the United Kingdom have a duty in Iraq, given our role there over the last 20 years and perhaps in the past as well, to step up to the plate and support these sufferers of not just internal displacement but in particular of sexual and other sorts of violence as they try to return home. Will the Minister say what level of support we are providing for education, psychological support and improved governance in Sinjar, in the hope that the women who were sold into repeated rapes and sexual slavery will at some point have the confidence to rebuild their lives and the ability to return home with their families?

I will draw out two points from the Iraqi experience in relation to women and girls worldwide. Education and the crucial issue of tackling the culture of impunity in relation to sexual violence in conflict are central. As Members of your Lordships' House know, I believe very strongly that the global goals of the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development provide a framework in which we can make a real difference over these years in development both globally and here at home.

Two goals stand out for me in particular as most likely to deliver the goal of gender equality—the goal on education and goal 16 on peace and justice. In every country where women face colossal discrimination, not just casual or structural discrimination but deep violence and discrimination through child marriage, sexual abuse and lack of rights, education, opportunity and individual freedom, education has to be one of the keys to changing that situation. Our investment in girls' education over recent years has been substantial and very welcome, but I hope that, when the UK goes to the United Nations in July with our voluntary national review report on the global goals, we will not just reinforce that commitment to global education but go further and commit to supporting education for these internally displaced children. There are nearly 20 million of them worldwide; they are the responsibility of their national Governments rather than of the international community, but I believe that we have a humanitarian responsibility to them. If we genuinely believe in gender equality, we need to ensure that education gets to these girls, and to their brothers as well.

I also believe that we need to expand further the very welcome Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative and the other initiatives that successive Governments in the UK have undertaken to try to improve conflict prevention and reduce the impact of conflict globally. Under goal 16, we should be leading the charge for a major international initiative that pulls these different strands of work together and recognises that conflict today is based on identity and deep in the psychology of those involved, but also that it increasingly affects civilians, particularly women and girls, more than it affects combatants. We need to find a way in the review of the global goals that will take place at the United Nations in September to reinforce the commitment to goal 16 and also to lead an initiative that would put goal 16 at the heart of the work of the United Nations on its 75th anniversary next year.

There has never been a time in the cause of conflict prevention and dealing with those affected by violent conflict—apart from the world wars, which were of course particular occasions—when so many people in so many countries have been affected by this. The United Kingdom could take a lead here. There are so many countries around the world that would want to be involved in such an initiative, and so many places that need it.

I hope that we can lead an international charge as we go through not just the voluntary national review of our commitment to the global goals at the United Nations in July but the review of the goals themselves in September, and into the 75th anniversary of the United Nations next year. Conflict prevention—that

[LORD MCCONNELL OF GLENSCORRODALE]  
is, preventing violence and sexual violence in conflict as well as all the other violence going on around the world today—could be the great challenge for the UN in the decades to come.

4.25 pm

**Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Con):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord; I think that I speak for all noble Lords when I express my appreciation of his support. I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and congratulate the Minister on securing time for it in the House.

The Women Deliver conference and this debate are forums where we can focus on gender equality and the health, rights and well-being of women and girls in the 21st century. This year, 40 years since the adoption of CEDAW, they give us the opportunity not only to celebrate some successes but to renew our commitment to women's rights ahead of the UK's voluntary national review of the SDGs next month. Indeed, it is important that we ensure continued focus. As we have heard, we are seeing a shrinking of space for civil society across the world and the global withdrawal of access to abortions and other reproductive health services from the US, with the targeting of women's human rights defenders prevalent in many countries. We even see this rollback at the UN. As my noble friend the Minister told us, UNSCR 2467 on conflict-related sexual violence, passed in April, was not able to hold on to the language on sexual health and reproductive rights of the Beijing Declaration and platform for action.

Next year is a very important year: it is the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the 25th anniversary of the Beijing platform for action and the fifth anniversary of the SDGs. The US will chair the G7 summit and Saudi Arabia is due to chair the G20. I am concerned that there will be further attempts to undermine global progress. The UK needs to stand firm for the hard-won victories on global gender equality and sexual and reproductive health rights.

Before I go further, I should draw attention to my various roles in development and women's interest organisations as listed in the register of interests. In particular, I co-chair the APPG on Women, Peace and Security and I am a member of the steering board for the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative.

We could discuss so many issues this afternoon but I wish to focus on a few that I feel incredibly strongly about. As we have heard, it is in conflict countries that women suffer most, and their rights roll back. Since the adoption of the women, peace and security agenda through UNSCR 1325 in 2000, only 27% of peace agreements have referenced women. Between 1992 and 2011, women made up only 9% of negotiators in peace processes and 4% of signatories; that fell to 3% between 2008 and 2012. Yet we know that where women are included in peace processes, there is a 20% increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least two years and a 35% increase in the probability of it lasting at least 15 years. We also know that unless women are included at the table, there will be peace and security in a country for only half the population and women will remain at risk.

The UK “holds the pen” at the UN on women, peace and security. However—forgive me, for I know that I have asked this question before—nearly 19 years after the adoption of Resolution 1325, why are Syrian women not allowed at the peace table? We should not have to justify why women should be included in peace processes; we should ask the men to justify why they are not. As we look at the tentative peace processes in Yemen and Afghanistan, where are the women? I understand that the US, which is convening the talks with the Taliban, has a law to include women in peace processes, but it seems that it is being totally ignored. How can we in the UK exert global influence to make sure that more countries adhere to what they have signed up to?

The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, launched by William Hague and Angelina Jolie in 2012, brought this issue to global attention. As we have heard, it affects men as well as women, although the majority of victims are women. The initiative was always going to be a marathon, not a sprint, and the situation was and continues to be of such magnitude that it needs sustained and long-term effort. Can the Minister update us on the plans for the PSVI international conference that the UK will host this November, five years on from the 2014 global summit? We need to ensure that the UK and indeed the world does not lose focus on this issue and to keep the pressure up. One only has to look at the conflicts raging today—the high levels of sexual violence committed by Daesh against the Yazidis or the stories coming out of the Rohingya camp at Cox's Bazar—to see how very relevant the initiative is.

I spoke in greater detail about the crisis involving adolescent girls in my Question for Short Debate earlier this year. UNESCO statistics tell us that girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school if they live in conflict-affected countries and that adolescent girls are a staggering 90% more likely to miss school. It is not unexpected that access to education is curtailed during conflict, but I put it to the House that the needs of adolescent girls are falling through the gaps of the global humanitarian response. It is clear that in conflict and crisis-affected settings, adolescent girls are at increased risk of a number of horrors which result in a greater need for sexual and reproductive health services due to unwanted pregnancies, STIs and unsafe abortions. Some 507 girls and women die every day in humanitarian contexts due to childbirth or pregnancy-related complications. The World Health Organization states that the risk of pregnancy-related death for adolescent girls is twice as high for those aged 15-19 and five times as high for those age 10-14 compared with a woman in her twenties.

Access to services and information is extremely challenging in humanitarian settings and is often inadequate and poor. Limits to girls' mobility are often intensified and access is dependent on adults accompanying them to any safe space or health clinic where services may be provided. Twenty-six per cent of the adolescent girls interviewed by Plan International for its research reported having considered suicide at least once in the past 12 months. What was the outcome of the conference with reference to this specific sector of need? Can the Minister update us on how DfID is

working across outward-facing departments such as the FCO, the DIT and the MoD regarding joint country plans? How many of them are gender-proofed for these issues?

Finally, as we have heard, it will be very difficult to empower women without them having power over their own bodies and the ability to control the number of children they have. I pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, for her work in this area. It is estimated that each year worldwide, more than 200 million women want to avoid pregnancy but have no access to modern contraception and that 25 million unsafe abortions take place. The rollback on this from the US and others has to be resisted at all costs. It is an attack on women across the world. I was glad to hear from my noble friend the Minister that the UK will continue to support the work. We need to stand strong on this.

I realise that there are many subjects, such as the importance of girls' education, that I have not touched upon. There is much in the work of the UK that we should be enormously proud of, such as the Girls' Education Challenge, but so much more still needs to be done. Perhaps I may ask the Minister how much of our total aid goes to women's NGOs or women's organisations based in developing countries. It is often these smaller organisations working on the ground which can make a big difference. Can we make sure that we are working more on prevention rather than cure, and thus truly remain a leader in this field as we push towards the SDGs?

4.34 pm

**Baroness Osamor (Lab):** My Lords, it is a great privilege to participate in this important debate secured by the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, and I welcome her to her new post.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau opened the conference on 3 June. He argued:

"Gender equality is under attack", and expressed sympathy about, "how hard it is to be a feminist on the front lines". He highlighted the negative role of social media and suggested:

"Individuals and interest groups are trying to roll back women's rights ... politicians are giving into the pressure, shamefully campaigning to undo women's hard-won victories".

Such a reversal of rights has been conducted by some of our closest historical allies, and it is only right that the UK uses its position to lobby our global partners. Will the Minister detail what recent representations the Government have made to our closest allies over women's rights?

The global fight for women's rights and equality must involve partners from across the world, rather than our international allies. It is disappointing, then, that many invitees to the Women Deliver conference from African countries had their visas declined with little explanation. In the developing world we see some of the greatest challenges for women's rights, so we must work with the leaders and representatives of these states if we are to realise equality. As the UK is expected to host later this year a global summit to end sexual violence, can the Minister confirm that such a conference will involve representatives from across the world?

One thread that binds together powerful movements that have sparked social change in recent years is that young people are at the centre. The youth at the conference asked:

"Why meaningful youth engagement? Today's world is too often divided—between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' ... the 'global north' and 'global south' ... 'developed', 'under developed' and 'developing' ... 'donors' and 'beneficiaries' ... What if people in positions of power could co-create with young people the policies, programs, and tools that best fit their community's wants and needs?"

What is not to like? A gender-equal world would be wealthier, healthier and more peaceful.

Storytelling in New York during the 63rd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, CSW, a young woman from Botswana, Lorato Modongo—who, with her male siblings, was brought up by her grandmother—told the conference:

"I witnessed inequality in everyday life: in education, in access to health services, in transport, in political power, and in ... family life. But it clicked and became ... clearer when I was recruited to participate in research project during my 3rd year at University of Botswana.

During this project, we explored access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services for young girls like me. We explored how girls showed up in my world.

Hushed.

Invisible.

Respectful.

Nice.

Ambitious but with a limit.

Aware of self, but not too self-aware so as to not scare men off.

We explored how the world showed up for girls like me: With violence and rage and policing.

We explored our reality. The prevalence of sexual violence and rape and all types of violence upon our bodies. Although gender-based violence is prevalent across the world, in Botswana, over 67 percent of women have experienced abuse—which is double the global average. Research shows that 40 women are raped each week in the country.

We explored the policies and laws that sought to either protect us, or further our plight in the patriarchal society. We explored all this and own existence and agency in the world.

I better understood how access to SRHR and agency over women's bodies are all linked to gender inequality. But it all began when I was 8. Access, or lack thereof, to SRHR services is linked to a need to police, dominate, and control women's bodies.

Until we ... dismantle patriarchy and gender inequality at the core within a family and community, we will not make progress at a societal, national, or global level.

In the words of Tapiwa Mugabe, 'My ancestors live and breathe vicariously through me.' Unlike my grandmother's generation, I have the space to speak up and speak out.

Being here today, I know she would be proud. Her defiant, rebellious granddaughter who at 8 refused to clean the house, stands before you today at 29 refusing to accept how the world shows up for women like me, for women like us".

Lorato was born and raised in Botswana. She earned a Mandela Rhodes Scholarship to pursue a master's degree in research psychology. She is also a Women Deliver young leader from the class of 2013.

The World Bank has called violence against women and girls a "global pandemic." Does the Minister agree that this issue is a top priority for her department, and that the only way substantially to reduce these figures is to work alongside women in their own communities who are tackling the root causes of gender inequality and the structures that uphold it?

[BARONESS OSAMOR]

HIV remains the number one killer of women of a reproductive age. What steps is the Minister taking to invest in new public health-driven research and development to find effective and affordable treatments for diseases in the developing world? To realise the vision and reap the benefits of a gender-equal world, we need to redefine power on every level—politically, economically, collectively and individually.

Governments hold a big piece of the puzzle when it comes to shifting power in favour of gender equality, and some are already moving in the right direction. For example, Iceland has made the gender pay gap illegal. In Norway, there is paid mandatory parental leave, while France is a global leader in educational attainment.

On women and international development, with the Government's review of progress towards the sustainable development goals expected soon, can the Minister confirm that the UK is on track to meet the women's equality and empowerment targets?

On the eve of the Women Deliver conference in Vancouver from 3 to 6 June, Princess Sarah Zeid of Jordan interviewed Dr Olfat Mahmoud, a Palestinian refugee and women's rights advocate. Dr Olfat grew up in a refugee camp in Lebanon. Princess Sarah spoke with Dr Olfat about what the humanitarian system would look like if organisations such as hers could help to shape it, and the message that she hopes to bring to Women Deliver. She said:

"I established the Palestinian Women's Humanitarian Organization (PWHO) to fill these gaps and fulfill the needs of refugee girls and women so they can lead better futures. Not a single international organization stepped up to do this important work—so I knew that change had to come from those of us within the community ... This includes respecting and upholding international agreements, including UN resolutions, which support and protect refugees. It also means addressing legal restrictions that keep refugee women from working, obtaining formal education, and exercising other basic human rights in their host countries ... The alternative—excluding refugee women from decisions that affect their work and lives—isn't acceptable and isn't working. When we are engaged, we make humanitarian policy and practice stronger and more effective ... At the same time, I hope to learn from other advocates around the world, and build networks so we can collectively push for a humanitarian system that puts girls and women at the center. Solidarity is our strength and our power—and we need to be stronger together to achieve a better world for all of us".

In its most recent annual commitment to reducing inequality review, Oxfam recommends that all countries develop national inequality action plans if they are to achieve sustainable development goal 10 on reducing inequality. What efforts are being made in the UK to develop such an action plan, and how is DfID working alongside Governments in the countries where it works to support their inequality action plans?

4.46 pm

**Baroness Goudie (Lab):** My Lords, I congratulate the Minister on her speech at the Women Deliver conference. I look forward to working with her in her present position and to her taking the work further forward.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the Women Deliver conference this year, but I have attended it a number of times with my colleagues from ICRW. I declare my interests as set out in the register. Women

Deliver is a leading global advocate for the health, rights and welfare of girls and women and drives financial and political views of women worldwide. It started as a small organisation and has now become global. Spending very little money, this year it brought more than 8,000 people to Vancouver. That is a great commitment as people have to get themselves there. There is no other way—no payment, no expenses, nothing. People come, young and old. It gets results across all aspects of the lives of women. It is a true catalyst, leveraging its reach worldwide, reaching partnerships and investing in girls. It uses strong methods of communicating, from hard facts to storytelling, and utilising all its members and supporters at all levels. It is an organisation that communicates well through Instagram, messaging and every other way it can in an informal but positive way.

The global conference brings together a diverse group of young and old, future and current leaders, NGOs, Governments and advocates from around the world. Once when I went there was hardly a Minister there, although it was enormous. Now, every Government have a Minister there. Every institution and philanthropic organisation is there. It is an organisation worth being part of, and we must continue to support it.

Britain, Canada and the Scandinavian countries have led the way in girls' rights, including health, maternal health and education. These countries have raised the level of awareness of the issues. Working with the Home Office, the Department for Education, the Foreign Office and the community, we must try to end FGM, honour killings and child marriages. Girls Not Brides is launching a further, tougher programme in the near future, and I hope the Government will support it.

On honour killings, FGM and Girls Not Brides, I hope that the Government will today give an undertaking that we will not go back to the Home Office charging people to bring members of their families back to this country, as it previously did. It happened to some extent but I would like to get an undertaking in this debate that it will never be allowed to happen again. It was an absolute disgrace.

We have had discussions about women's rights being on the front line and under extreme strain. What do these people—including women, unfortunately—hate about women and girls, and about us and these issues? Do they not know that this is the future of the world? It is agreed that good education for girls and better and continual education for women around the world improves GDP by \$15 billion to \$30 billion a year—a figure that comes from McKinsey and the Malala Fund. It is so important that education is raised at every international meeting. I hope that the Chancellor and other Cabinet Ministers who will attend some of the G20 meetings still to be held will raise those issues and that Britain's commitment to provide funding will encourage others to do so.

We must also put pressure on America. I know that we have a so-called special relationship with America but I often wonder how it is going these days. We must keep nagging the US, stressing that these issues are of paramount importance to that country as well as ours. We know that if we do not educate girls—and, to an extent, boys—there will be much more terrorism. That

is why it is so important that education comes first, not just in our country but around the world. We must also commit more to the sustainable development goals—an issue on which my noble friend Lord McConnell has worked tremendously hard. We must continue to move forward.

I turn to one issue we have touched on a little in our debates that worries me: children born through rape and sexual violence, both in war and in camps. Those born under these circumstances carry an instant stigma, but that should not be the case. They are made to feel worthless and are not entitled to education, basic healthcare or some basic jobs. That is still happening in Vietnam and other countries, and we must act to end it now. These children must not be left without anything, and the stigma must be wiped away. I hope that this matter will be taken forward in DfID's and the Foreign Office's policies in the future, because it will not help us if this stigma continues. We heard recently about what is happening in Vietnam and one or two other countries, and it will cause unsettlement and envy in the world. We must promise that every child will be equal, as we have been taught in this country. Every child must be equal, whatever the circumstances in which they are born. How they come into the world is not their fault.

In the next few years there will be more refugees than ever as a result of conflict and climate change, and we must keep these issues at the forefront, along with the PSVI and the women, peace and security agenda. I acknowledge the leadership that the noble Lord, Lord Hague, the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, and my friend Ambassador Verveer have given on these issues. They now also have the support of the Countess of Wessex. I hope that the Government will support the proposal of the noble Lord, Lord Hague, put forward today by the noble Baroness, Lady Helic. It is really important, as this is where we can bring about change, and I hope that the commitment at the November conference will take it forward.

Various issues have been raised today but one thing that worries me is the lack of joined-up funding on these issues between DfID, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. Who is responsible for ensuring that this happens? There must be buy-in from the highest level of the Cabinet Office and No. 10. It is unfair on those working on these issues if they do not have full commitment from the very top. This is also a priority for peace, so it is extremely important that the funding is not cut. It is very difficult when two and a half people in DfID, three in the Foreign Office and two in the Ministry of Defence are working on this issue. We need more funding for good, qualified people to work alongside our people. This also needs to be properly joined up so that when the Minister comes here, she can give us as well as those working on these issues an assurance.

We should look at the indexes that prove where women are unsafe in countries in conflict. We can tell this through various indexes, including Georgetown University's Women, Peace and Security Index, which has looked at more than 100 countries. We can tell through the index whether a country is becoming unsafe; it shows where women feel unsafe in the street, at work and going out, and where their children feel

unsafe going to school. We must use that index and others like it to help us judge what is happening around the world and put our funding where it is needed. We have made a commitment to various countries, but we may need to add to it. I do not want us to water down funding. We do not want to give a bit here or there where it cannot make enough difference; we have to get others to contribute.

Women have to be part of the decision-making at every table on women, peace and security issues. Britain has given that undertaking but at the same time, as many noble Lords have mentioned, women are not at the table on Syria and they are not part of the peace talks in Afghanistan or in other countries. We have to take over the leadership of these peace talks; we have to say that we will not be supportive unless local women are there. We have given an undertaking; that is fine. But we now have physically to put that measure into being. We cannot have men saying, "They don't know", or, "We don't want them". Without women at the table, we will not get education, health or inward investment for those communities. They will be left with sink schools and as sink people. This is vital.

I hope that, when we get a new Prime Minister, he makes commitments to these issues in his speeches in the next few weeks or months, or whenever it may be. I hope also that he will consider having a Cabinet that is 50% women and having more women at the table. I know that an undertaking has been given—and it is beginning to happen—that 50% of all chairmen of government bodies outside should be women, but I would like this to happen in the Cabinet and in other government positions.

4.57 pm

**Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB):** My Lords, I join other noble Lords in congratulating the Minister on the leadership she has shown, both in her speech opening this debate and in the way that she is taking these issues forward. The theme is rightly on Women Deliver: it is worth reflecting that we have already heard in the debate how women deliver not only children, but their upbringing; they deliver food and water to those who need them; where they receive education they then deliver education in spades; they deliver—and really are the route to—peace; and when older they deliver as grandmothers when a mother is ill or has died.

In March 2018, the Department for International Development published its strategic vision, stating its intention to,

"step up and deliver results for girls and women, pressing DfID and its partners to take action across the board to make gender equality a reality".

Education and healthcare are of course key priorities in addressing gender inequality, particularly maternal, sexual and reproductive health rights. As has already been pointed out, every year more than 300,000 women die from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth; 99% of these deaths occur in developing countries and more than half in sub-Saharan Africa.

The vast majority of maternal deaths, injuries and illnesses could be prevented but, sadly, not all. Even when high-quality reproductive and maternal health services are in place, things sometimes go wrong. On

[BARONESS FINLAY OF LLANDAFF]

my way here, in preparation for the debate, I had a communication from UNESCO's Bioethics Group, of which I am a member, representing my department at Cardiff University. It concerned something that happened last week. Following the death in delivery of a patient, a mob attacked the intensive care unit at a hospital, assaulted the staff with rods, including the female gynaecologist, and left her severely injured. In Darjeeling, violence against medical professionals seems to be reaching new heights, as this recent case of assault shows. The incident took place at the Darjeeling Sadar district hospital on Saturday, when a pregnant woman with a history of cardiac illness, thus already at great risk, was brought there by her family. She collapsed in the ward and was rushed into coronary care but when the doctor conducted a ventouse—that is, a vacuum delivery—in difficult circumstances, sadly the baby was delivered dead. The patient was intubated immediately after delivery, but all resuscitation efforts failed and she died within a few minutes. The news of the patient's death reached the family and an angry mob rushed in, attacking the staff and vandalising the ICU. I was sent photographs of this poor woman sitting on a bloodstained floor with her head bandaged, having been attacked when she had done all that she could to resuscitate the patient.

There are movements highlighting the problem of women delivering healthcare being attacked. In the eight months to the end of last year, 60 women doctors were beaten up in Kashmir. The result, sadly, has been that some women doctors are staying away from labour wards because they are just too frightened to deal with women with complications. There are movements such as “stop violence against doctors” and “doctors are also human”. In all our debates, we must remember that unless we protect women healthcare workers, we really will not be able to provide the services that women need, particularly because they often need them from other women. An interesting recent study from America showed that women providing front-line clinical care carry a much greater burden of the childcare and domestic duties than their partners do, even when they are working full-time or more than their partners are.

Maternal mortality rates are notably high in areas of conflict. In conflict, access to contraception is often one of the first things that women lose. Clinics close, doctors move on, medical supplies diminish and, as we have heard, women often become the victims of gender-based violence. That violence continues long after a peace agreement has been signed. UK development and peace and security strategies must ensure that there is a gender perspective to protect the human rights of women and girls and, as has been said, ensure their participation in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. As has been said, in war zones women and girls are often targeted for rape. Women and their children make up approximately 80% of all refugees, as stated by the State of World Population report. Emergency contraception can be critical, and it is also important for women who are unable to have their partners negotiate condom use.

Women who are affected by conflict often lose their homes and their income. They may be forced into prostitution and other exploitative relationships in order to feed themselves and their families. Despite the role of condoms in preventing sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, if the partner refuses to use one, women have little power to persuade them. A recent report by Family Planning 2020, *FP2020 Catalyzing Collaboration 2017-2018*, found that the push to boost the number of women in the poorest countries using safe contraception seems to be slipping. Despite an increase of 46 million in the number of women accessing contraception in the last six years, reaching a total of 317 million, the report said:

“Looking at projected trends, the hill is simply too steep to climb in the two years remaining in this initiative”.

As we have heard, the impact of sexual violence lives on for decades. As the noble Baroness, Lady Goudie, has said, in Vietnam there is a major problem. The Lai Dai Han are the tens of thousands of children of Vietnamese women raped by some of the 320,000 South Korean soldiers deployed to fight alongside the US during the Vietnam War. The story of one woman is quite telling. She was a young nurse, a virgin at the time, who became pregnant and was then ostracised by her family. Her attempted abortion failed and she gave birth to a daughter. Suffering a life of shame, secrecy and prejudice, she was later brutally raped twice more by soldiers, giving birth to another girl and a boy. She has raised her children singlehandedly, but they have all experienced bullying and cruelty from the local community.

Some of those raped or subjected to sexual violence were as young as 12 or 13. There are more than 800 such victims alive and tens of thousands of young adults of mixed Vietnamese-Korean heritage living in the shadows in their own society. Many live in severe poverty, with no access to healthcare and education. Because many are illiterate, they cannot advocate for themselves.

Even in peacetime, affordable contraception can be an elusive goal. I recall an auntie who, in the 1960s, volunteered to provide family planning services when she was living in the West Indies. She said that even though they fitted women with diaphragms, she discovered that the diaphragms were being collected by men after sexual intercourse and held as trophies, so they were becoming single-use contraception only, rather than being for repeated use. It highlighted the problem for these women in avoiding pregnancies when they wanted to do so.

The recent report from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, the watchdog scrutinising spending, highlighted that between 2011 and 2015,

“DFID did not pursue the strengthening of health systems to provide quality maternal care with the same intensity as it did for family planning, nor did it do enough to address the barriers that the poorest women face in accessing health services”.

Although Britain has been praised as,

“a vocal champion of family planning and safe abortion”,

I ask the Minister why DfID are not doing more to champion safe pregnancy and delivery. We know that, “severe shortages of beds, trained personnel, equipment and supplies”,

mean that women are dying from “basic obstetric complications”, including obstructed labour, uterine rupture, eclampsia, haemorrhaging to death and dying of infection. This very high maternal mortality cannot be tolerated around the world. We should be making sure that, during birth, every woman is attended by somebody who knows what to do when the biggest emergencies arise.

Sierra Leone has the highest maternal mortality rate: one in 17 women there have a lifetime risk of death associated with childbirth. In the Pujehun district, for example, there is just one ambulance for a population of 340,000. In the fallout following Ebola, healthcare has become more difficult overall, and it is predicted that this mortality rate will rise further. In Sudan, the aid ban is exposing women to risky births; the story of one woman was covered in the *Guardian* in 2017.

In some countries, things are being done well. In some Middle Eastern countries, mosques are serving as more than just centres of faith and are being used for training people in the insertion of IUDs and so on. The WHO has launched a new tool on safe contraception for front-line care providers, which provides guidance on the who and how of delivery, including a checklist to confirm that a woman is not pregnant.

The UNFPA’s aim to achieve three zeros by 2030, “zero unmet need for contraception; zero preventable maternal deaths; and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation”, is laudable. We must cling on to that. We must also follow the example already given and provide leadership across the world.

5.09 pm

**Baroness Sheehan (LD):** My Lords, I add my thanks to the Minister for bringing this Motion to your Lordships’ House and for giving all those who have taken part in the debate an opportunity to highlight the good work that the Women Deliver conference does. I pay tribute to the many and varied contributions we have had to the debate, not least those from my noble friend Lady Hussein-Ece, my noble friend—if I can refer to her as such—Lady Tonge, and the noble Baroness, Lady Osamor, for their first-hand accounts and appreciation of the conference. A special commendation is due to the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, not only for being the only man to contribute to the debate but for the elegant contribution that he made.

The contributions all served to illustrate that a world without the flair and imagination, and the sheer drive and determination that women bring to workplaces and the home would be an immeasurably poorer world, in which the SDG ambition to leave no one behind would not be realised. We have also heard of the many hardships, indignities and sometimes outright cruelties inflicted on women.

Although we are used to the daily injustices that women face in the developing world, it is hard to understand how we have come to a situation in which women’s control over their own bodies is coming under threat in the USA. My fear is that actions such as those in Alabama will serve as a model to aspire to for other populist regimes, of which we see an increasing number around the world. The fact that so many noble Lords have mentioned the same point goes to

illustrate how very serious the developing situation is. I hope that the Minister will convey our concerns to those concerned in the USA.

The opportunities given to us by fora such as the Women Deliver conference, the United Nations Security Council in passing Resolution 2467 on sexual violence in conflict in April this year, and the Ending Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Crises conference in Oslo just last month, are invaluable in keeping women’s rights front and centre of humanitarian issues. But it is not easy. Let us consider Resolution 2467. Many feel that its language was ultimately watered down during negotiations to appease the United States. This included removing references to safe access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services for survivors, as well as the specific needs of LGBT people, who are often targeted during conflict. The call for a working group to review progress on ending sexual violence was also removed. So do our Government have any plans to monitor the progress of the UK and other UN member states in implementing Resolution 2467?

It is true that the UK Government have taken some notable steps towards protecting women and girls in conflict, particularly through the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, launched by the Foreign Office in 2012, which seeks to raise awareness of the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. Through the PSVI we have spent £46 million, providing support for Governments, police, judiciary, the military and NGOs for evidence-gathering and training for prosecuting these crimes. The UK Government are also working alongside Nadia Murad’s initiative and the Institute for International Criminal Investigations to develop the Murad code, which will set ethical standards for the prosecution of sexual violence in conflict. I could not agree more with the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, and with the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, that it is only when the perpetrators of these heinous crimes are brought to justice that we will see a decline in them.

Although these initiatives are all to be applauded, the issue of sexual violence in conflict is still severely underfunded. As we have heard already, according to the International Rescue Committee, specific funding for combating gender-based violence in emergencies accounted for only a paltry 0.12% of the total humanitarian response spend from 2016 to 2018. It similarly estimates that there is currently a \$104.2 million funding gap for gender-based violence services in emergencies. So what specific steps is DfID taking to close this gap and to encourage other major donors to follow suit? While I am on the subject, what percentage of DfID’s own spend is currently focused on gender-based violence services?

I now turn to the issue of what role soldiers should have in addressing issues around sexual violence in conflict. My understanding is that the previous Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, was of the opinion that troops should have a role in protecting civilians—particularly women—from human rights violations. However, as far as I am aware, little information was given on whether training for the troops would be tailored to account for cultural sensitivity to the specific context of each conflict, whether consultation with

[BARONESS SHEEHAN]

local women's organisations would be prioritised, or how the military programme would co-ordinate its efforts with the PSVI and DfID programmes. The more I think about soldiers being involved in work with severely traumatised women and girls with complex medical, psychiatric and social needs, the more alarmed I become. Surely this work is best left to trained professionals with the necessary skills? I hope that the Minister agrees.

There is also the issue of increased danger faced by NGO staff if they are working in the same physical and humanitarian space as soldiers. According to OCHA, the United Nations Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 139 aid workers were killed in 2017 while doing their jobs. This number will increase if the roles of military and NGO staff are not kept very distinct.

Let me turn to Yemen. The UN Secretary-General has labelled Yemen,

“the world's worst humanitarian crisis”.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable. The UN estimates that there has been a 63% increase in incidents of gender-based violence since the conflict began. Yemen's peace efforts have been criticised for not doing enough to include women, and we have heard that the same has happened in Syria and Afghanistan, despite promises to act otherwise. However, earlier this year, at a meeting organised by Oxfam, I was privileged to meet some formidable Yemeni ladies—all civil society activists—who, with great difficulty, had managed to leave Yemen so that they could advocate for peace, food and medicines. They were; Dalia Qasim, co-founder of the Hodeidah Girls Foundation; Leila al-Shabibi, a women's rights activist; and Dr Aysha Thawab, who works in women's healthcare management. Their voices must be heard in the peace negotiations in Yemen. Research shows that the engagement of women is the secret to ensuring lasting peace. So says the World Economic Forum. According to UN Women, the likelihood of peace lasting more than two years increases by 20% when women participate in the peace process.

Can I ask the Minister whether she will ensure that Martin Griffiths, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, and Mark Lowcock, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Co-Ordinator, hear this plea? The women of Yemen are asking that they be given a seat at the table when talks to end the war take place.

To conclude, the Women Deliver conference in Vancouver focused on,

“power, and how it can drive—or hinder—progress and change”. Nowhere will that power tell more than in giving women a seat at the table where decisions are made at the highest level.

5.19 pm

**Baroness Gale (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the Minister for bringing this debate before us. I also thank all noble Baronesses who have spoken and my noble friend Lord McConnell; I am grateful to him as the only male who spoke today, since this is not just a women's issue. It was good that we heard at least one male voice speak today.

The organisation Women Deliver describes itself as a leading global advocate for the health, rights and well-being of girls and women. It brings together diverse voices and interests to drive progress towards gender equality, with a focus on maternal, sexual and reproductive health and rights. It builds capacity, shares solutions and forges partnerships, together creating coalitions, communication and action that spark political commitment and investment in girls and women. These are great aims and aspirations, so it is really good that the UK was represented at the conference earlier this month and that the Minister was in attendance. But we know there is still much work to do to ensure that women and girls achieve equality.

On health matters globally, it is a sad fact that between 47,000 and 70,000 women die each year owing to complications from unsafe abortions, while more than 14 million teenage girls give birth every year, mainly because of rape and unwanted pregnancy. According to the UN's figures, unsafe abortions cause the deaths of some 47,000 women each year and a further 5 million suffer some form of disability, some permanent. The noble Baronesses, Lady Hodgson and Lady Finlay, mentioned this. However, the World Health Organization says that unsafe abortions cause a significant proportion of maternal deaths and that nearly 70,000 women die each year owing to the complications of unsafe abortion. Its report said:

“The use of modern contraception has reduced the need for induced abortion, yet young women, especially when they are unmarried, often face difficulty in obtaining contraception and may resort to unsafe abortion. Globally, women of all ages seek abortions but in sub-Saharan Africa, which has the highest burden of ill-health and death from unsafe abortion, one in four unsafe abortions is among adolescents aged 15-19 years”.

In total, 99% of maternal deaths occur in the developing world, mainly in Africa and south Asia. I think we would all agree that that is an awful figure.

Meanwhile in sexual health, HIV remains the number one killer of women of reproductive age, while the rate of infection remains stubbornly high and has not declined among adults since 2010. In addition to HIV, TB can have severe consequences for women, especially during their reproductive years and pregnancies. In 2017, an estimated 3.2 million women fell ill with, and almost half a million died from, the disease. There must be a global effort to tackle this issue. The World Health Organization has previously called for greater TB data collection, disaggregated by sex and age. What steps are being taken to invest in new public health-driven research and development to find effective and affordable treatments for diseases in the developing world? Can the Minister say how the UK can contribute to this?

Violence against women globally is rife: 1 in 3 women worldwide will experience violence in their lifetime, usually due to someone they know. It is well known that violence against women and girls increases during all emergencies, including conflict, where rape and sexual violence can become a weapon of war. An analysis by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project found a global spike in incidents of violence against women politicians. We are all aware that this has become a really big problem. What steps

are the Government taking to encourage the safety of women campaigners, activists and politicians, in the UK and globally?

Five years on from the Government's high-profile Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, women's rights campaigners claim that we are no closer to ending the use of rape as a weapon of war. With the Government planning another international meeting on this topic this year, can the Minister say what will be done to ensure that, this time, promises turn into action? Does she agree that this issue must be a top priority for the Government, and that the only way to reduce these figures substantially is to work alongside women in their own communities who are tackling the root causes and structures of gender inequality? In a future Labour Government, the Department for International Development would work with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to review and develop strategies to protect civilians in conflict, including expanding cross-departmental capacity to respond rapidly to sexual and gender-based violence in emergencies.

As part of the UN's sustainable development goals, the UK and the wider world committed to women's equality and empowerment. However, a 2018 Brookings Institution assessing the progress of the SDGs found that,

"measures of gender equality are nowhere near on track for full success by 2030".

My noble friend Lady Warwick mentioned that just 0.1% of the total aid from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is committed to women's organisations, and 0.02% only to women's organisations based in developing countries. Given the vital role of women's groups in tackling gender inequality, what steps is the Minister's department taking to increase the funding for these organisations? With the Government's review of progress towards the sustainable development goals, can the Minister confirm whether the UK is on track to meet the women's equality and empowerment targets?

In the next Labour Government, the Department for International Development will implement the UK's first explicitly feminist international development policy, based on the principles of gender justice, rights, intersectionality and solidarity. Beyond simply measuring and addressing income inequality, Labour will work towards measuring and addressing inequalities and the exercise of rights to ensure that women and marginalised groups are not left behind.

Looking at the economic position of women globally, the World Economic Forum says that, at the current rate of progress, it will take an estimated 202 years before women and men participate equally and are paid the same, and gender equality in the economy is achieved. That is an awfully long time to wait for equality in this field. In the UK, women continue to face routine discrimination in pay, with almost eight out of 10 British companies paying men more than women.

Under the Conservative Government, progress in the UK has been rolled back for women, with cuts to public services and social security hitting them disproportionately. A Labour Government will gender audit all policy and legislation for its impact on women

before implementation. We have announced that, in addition to reporting their gender pay gap figures, companies will be required to demonstrate how they plan to close their gender pay gaps by producing action plans. That is something I have asked for before, so I hope the Minister will give a positive reply to it today.

I welcome the Government's domestic abuse Bill, especially its commitment to ratify the Istanbul convention, which the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, mentioned in her speech. The Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill published its first report on Friday 14 June, and said that, to ratify it, the UK Government must follow its measures in all the territories of the UK. Only 11 states are yet to ratify the Istanbul convention and the UK is one of them. I hope that the domestic abuse Bill will comply with the convention. However, the Joint Committee scrutinising the Bill has said:

"The absence of legislation relating to Northern Ireland for some key aspects of the Bill has therefore become a significant issue in discussion of the extent to which measures in this Bill alone would make the UK compliant with the Convention ... We consider it unacceptable that the people of Northern Ireland are denied the same level of protection in relation to domestic abuse as those elsewhere in the United Kingdom because of the lack of a Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly ... but in the absence of an executive we recommend that the provisions of the draft Bill be extended to Northern Ireland unless and until Northern Ireland enacts its own legislation in this area".

When the Government respond to the report, I hope that they will acknowledge that they must act, otherwise the UK may not be able to ratify the convention. The Minister might be aware that there are other aspects of the Bill that outside organisations are not 100% happy with in terms of allowing us to implement the Istanbul convention.

We have had a very good debate. I wish that I had been at the Women Deliver conference, because it sounded so good. I have been to other international conferences. In March, I went with the noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson, to a great CEDAW conference in New York. It is good that we have such international conferences, which allow many people from all over the world to get together.

What I am really interested in is the follow-up from these conferences, including the Women Deliver conference. The aims are good, but can the Minister say what difference this will make to the way in which the UK works in the national and international field? What plans and progress are being made to improve the lives of women and girls globally? We have had a great debate. I look forward to her reply.

5.32 pm

**Baroness Sugg:** My Lords, I thank every Member of the House who has attended the debate and contributed today. I thank, too, those noble Baronesses who were able to travel to Vancouver to attend the conference. It is great that we have cross-party representation at such international events, and long may that continue. We have heard some powerful messages from across the Chamber. It is vital that we continue to discuss and debate gender equality and to ensure that the issue receives the attention that it deserves. I also thank noble Lords—and, of course, noble Baronesses—for the important work that they have done to raise this issue outside the Chamber and to improve the lives of

[BARONESS SUGG]

women and girls. Many issues have been raised. I shall try to get through as many of them as I can, so I shall turn to them straightaway.

The importance of girls' education was highlighted by the noble Baronesses, Lady Hussein-Ece and Lady Goudie, and the noble Lord, Lord McConnell. The UK is a global leader on girls' education. Our support helps girls to access and stay in education, so that they can help their families and communities to prosper as well as the economy. Over the last three years, we have spent nearly £700 million a year on average through our bilateral programmes on education. We also have the Girls' Education Challenge, which is our flagship programme. We are determined to continue showing leadership in this area.

I agree with the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, on the importance of continued education in conflict zones, ensuring that girls—and boys—do not drop out in those difficult situations. We know that the situation is worse in conflict. Girls are two and a half times more likely to be out of school than boys. We are therefore one of the largest contributors to Education Cannot Wait, which is a fund for education and humanitarian emergencies. That fund expects to reach 8 million children by 2021. We are also supporting the No Lost Generation initiative, which has helped more than half a million vulnerable children displaced by conflict from Syria and Iraq to access education in host countries, including Lebanon and Jordan, as well as providing safe spaces, counselling and medical and psychological care.

I thank the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for highlighting the important goal 16, on peace, justice and strong institutions. We in the UK were integral in getting that included, and we will continue to champion it. In fact, in July when I travel to New York for the high-level forum, I am due to attend an event to highlight goal 16.

Many noble Lords raised the issue, as I did in my opening speech, of the global rollback of women's rights. We have witnessed a visible drive against gender equality over the last decade. A growing number of states have been emboldened to challenge our internationally agreed positions on gender equality because of this rollback. It is evident at national level in developed as well as developing countries, as was highlighted today. We have seen legislation weakening the protection of girls against marriage in at least five countries in which we operate, but more progressive regimes such as here in the UK are countering this rollback. Our position is very clear that, in order to achieve gender equality and to empower all girls and women, we have to fight back against this rollback. We will continue to play a world-leading role on the global stage.

What are we doing on that? We are working really closely with like-minded countries to protect existing agreed language on sexual and reproductive health and rights in international negotiations. As I said, we deeply regret that the language was not included in Resolution 2467 and were disappointed that we were not able to see the inclusion of established language in the G7 gender equality communiqué. As for new

international texts, we have the upcoming political declaration at the UN high-level meeting on universal health coverage ahead of UNGA this year and are working very closely with like-minded countries to advance UK priorities—that was something we discussed in Canada.

The noble Baroness, Lady Flather, highlighted how economic empowerment can change the perception of women in societies. I agree entirely. Women's economic empowerment is one of the biggest potential levers we have to boost global prosperity and we are leading on that. We are helping to build a more prosperous world through women. Between 2011 and 2015, we helped more than 36 million women gain access to financial services and helped 3 million women improve their land and property rights. We have a flagship central programme on women's economic empowerment, Work and Opportunities for Women, which looks to build on the momentum we saw after the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment.

Abortion was raised numerous times, and I was delighted to hear support from across the Benches for our policy on safe abortion, which takes an evidence-based public health approach that aims to reduce death and disability, which can be caused by unsafe abortions. We are clear, of course, that the best way to avoid abortion is to give women information and contraception so that they can decide whether, when and how many children to have. The primary aim and the vast majority of our investment in reproductive health is to increase the uptake of voluntary family planning, which of course helps reduce demand for abortion. There is still a substantial gap between the number of women who do not want to get pregnant and the number who can access contraception. A significant number of those women are at risk from death or disability because they are accessing unsafe abortions. We know that back-street abortions kill at least 23,000 women per year in the developing world. We know that restricting access to safe abortions does not reduce the number of abortions that take place; it just makes them less safe. Supporting comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls saves lives and supports prosperity, so we will continue to do that.

The noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, raised the question of abortion in conflict. Our position on that is that, in situations of armed conflict or occupation, international humanitarian law principles may justify offering an abortion rather than perpetuating what amounts to inhuman or degrading treatment. I am happy to repeat that position over and over again—I will learn it by heart. We also support the roll-out of a minimum initial service package for reproductive health in crises, which includes the provision of safe abortion care.

I am happy to confirm our continued commitment to 0.7% of our GNI going to overseas aid—that is now on our statute book, happily. I am proud to have been part of the coalition Government who got that on to the statute book. We will continue to support NGOs delivering SRHR services. In addition, of course, to being the largest donor to the UN sexual and reproductive health and rights agency, a significant amount of our funding for family planning is delivered directly through NGOs.

On the cost of these services, our family planning programmes are delivered in accordance with local government policies, and the financial model varies considerably from country to country. We are of course working to reduce the cost of family planning. We are promoting financial protection and reducing the costs of out-of-pocket health expenditure in the countries we work in to help reduce the burden on poor people and families and improve access to contraception. Our new regional WISH programme, with the IPPF, is focused on reaching the very poor and reducing costs on that. Some countries' programmes charge clients who can afford to pay, but they also employ a no-refusal policy to allow poor clients to access those services.

The noble Baroness, Lady Hussein-Ece, quite rightly raised the issue of abortion in Northern Ireland. Abortion has always been a devolved matter in Northern Ireland, and there are strongly held views on both sides of the debate. The Government's priority is to restore devolved government so that the people of Northern Ireland can decide, but we have put arrangements in place to allow women normally resident in Northern Ireland access to safe abortion services in England, including support for travel costs. The aim is to make them as accessible as possible, so that women can make use of these services without having to be referred by a medical professional in Northern Ireland.

Many noble Lords raised the US and its Mexico City policy—the global gag rule. Following the reintroduction and expansion of the Mexico City policy in January 2017, we have of course been keeping in close contact with our partners to ensure that the policy does not compromise UK support of comprehensive SRHR programming. The full implications are still not clear, but we are working, as I say, closely with other offices. We are not like-minded with the US on our policy on abortion. We do not agree with it on that, but we work with it closely on many aspects of international development. We have also worked closely together on family planning. It continues to be the biggest donor in that area, so we must work with it to advance common interests and tackle shared challenges where we can.

**Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe:** Could the Minister say whether we have in fact made representations to the US Government on the impact of their policy abroad, particularly where it is in direct conflict with our own policy?

**Baroness Sugg:** As I say, we are not in agreement on abortion in particular, but where we are in agreement we will continue to work very closely with the US. It is very clear on our position on that. I am afraid that our position will not change the US position, but we are making sure, along with our partners such as Marie Stopes International, that we are able to ensure the continued delivery of services for which we are responsible and on which our policy makes clear our position.

Turning to some points raised by my noble friend Lady Helic, I join her in paying tribute to my predecessor, my noble friend Lord Bates. He had an incredible depth and breadth of knowledge on this. As the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, said, he is a tough act to follow. He also helped on the gender balance in these debates, but I will do my best there. I also join her in

paying tribute to the work of the Civil Service in this country at DfID and elsewhere, which is really committed and determined to make real progress on gender equality. I also pay tribute to my noble friend for putting and keeping the issue of preventing sexual violence against women in conflict on the international agenda.

On the specific proposals supported by the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, and the noble Baroness, Lady Goudie, I agree that an international investigatory body to collect and preserve evidence is really important. We have all heard horrific stories of women who have gone through terrible situations, having to give evidence again and again to different people and sometimes having that evidence used against them when they finally get to prosecution. We have invested in a specialist team of experts that can be deployed globally, but we should absolutely do more in assisting and investigating allegations of conflict-related sexual violence and related war crimes, helping to gather that evidence and prepare case files to be used in eventual prosecutions. The FCO is considering carefully how best to support this proposal. I think my noble friend is meeting with them this week to discuss that further.

On the level of spending on combating sexual and gender-based violence, I absolutely agree that the UK should be doing more to prevent all forms of violence, including sexual violence. Through the PSVI and Oslo conferences, we are working on initiatives and we continue to challenge ourselves to do more. My noble friend Lady Helic and other noble Lords highlighted some recent research on how much money is spent on combating gender-based violence. The noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, asked how much we in DfID spend on it; I cannot give her a figure because we are unable to calculate it at the moment. DfID does not currently favour earmarking overseas development aid for specific projects but, as I said, we should do more in this area. I look forward to discussing the proposal with my noble friend in much more detail ahead of the summit in November.

My noble friend Lady Helic and the noble Baroness, Lady Gale, asked about the Istanbul convention. The Government remain committed to ratifying the convention as soon as possible. We already have measures in place in the UK to protect women and girls from violence. In most places, that complies with the convention or goes further than it requires. We signed the convention to signal our strong commitment to tackling violence. In October, we published a report setting out the UK's position; we are working to strengthen significantly a legislative framework there.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Tonge and Lady Flather, were quite right to raise the role of men and boys in gender equality. Some of the women I met in Vancouver said that the men in their communities felt that women had been overempowered or that things had “gone too far”, as the noble Baroness, Lady Hussein-Ece, put it. I do not agree with that description. Of course, as women's roles change, which is welcome, men's roles will change as well. Men and boys have long been taught that a woman holds a specific role in society; that must be addressed if women are truly to achieve gender equality and men are truly to accept it. It is important that we continue to work with men and boys as well as girls and women—indeed, with all of

[BARONESS SUGG]

society—on this issue. We work with Promundo, mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, and will continue to do so. It is doing good work in helping to change attitudes towards women. We fund and research programmes to engage with men and boys on a number of issues, including violence against women and girls, women's economic empowerment and preventing FGM.

The noble Lord, Lord McConnell, highlighted the situation in northern Iraq. I agree that we have a duty there. We are one of the largest humanitarian actors in Iraq. Since 2014, we have committed more than £250 million of humanitarian aid; that has supported some of the most vulnerable Iraqis with life-saving healthcare, psychosocial support and education. We absolutely support the return of the Yazidis and other communities displaced by Daesh—the ambassador recently discussed this issue in depth—and we have played an active part both in facilitating their return and making sure that there is a major humanitarian and stabilisation programme in Iraq. In particular, we are working on projects in Sinjar and Sinoni to ensure that those returns can happen, and we are pressing the Iraq and Kurdistan regional Governments for more progress on security and services in the liberated areas to allow such returns.

My noble friend Lady Hodgson and other noble Lords raised the role of women in peace and security. We continue to champion on the global stage the role of women and girls in preventing conflict. We hold the pen on Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which commits us to putting women and girls at the heart of our work. We have committed substantial funding to, and published our annual progress report on, that issue. We are the largest donor to the UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund. My noble friend quite rightly explained the benefit of involving women in conflict resolution. In January 2018, we launched our latest national action plan, which explains how we will put women and girls at the heart of our work.

Syria was mentioned specifically. We have launched a shared government approach to gender in Syria, which includes an outcome on ensuring that women have a meaningful voice in the peace process and peacebuilding discussions. We are working on that in various countries to ensure that women have a seat at the table.

The noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, asked specifically about Yemen. We are working in Yemen, Afghanistan and South Sudan to encourage efforts to include women in these processes, while through the CSSF we support the UN women-led Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security to increase the capacity of Yemeni women to influence the peace process.

My noble friend Lady Hodgson raised the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative ahead of the conference we are hosting in November. I pay tribute to my noble friends Lord Hague and Lady Helic for setting it up. We have seen achievements since the last conference five years ago last week. We have trained investigators into crimes of sexual violence and we have given £46 million to projects in 14 countries. We have trained film-makers, including in DRC, to raise

awareness of stigma, but there is much more to do. The objectives of the PSVI conference are to celebrate progress, address the remaining challenges and secure commitments to action. That will focus on securing justice for the survivors of sexual violence and indeed holding the perpetrators to account. We will look at the Murad code highlighted by the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan. I agree with the noble Baronesses, Lady Warwick and Lady Osamor, and others that it is really important that we hear from women's organisations and activists at meetings such as the Women Deliver conference and the upcoming PSVI conference not just to tell their stories but also to be properly involved in policy-making and next steps. I can reassure the noble Baroness that representatives from across the world will be there.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Goudie and Lady Finlay, highlighted the stigma faced by children born of rape in conflict. I agree entirely that we must tackle this and we are working with faith leaders ahead of the PSVI conference to see what more we can do to ensure that children born of rape are not unfairly stigmatised throughout their lives.

The issue of women's rights organisations was raised by the noble Baronesses, Lady Warwick and Lady Osamor. I agree about the critical role that such organisations play in transforming lives and we must do more on that. I mentioned in my opening speech our support for the Women Deliver Advocacy Academy and the AmplifyChange fund which is funding 40 grassroots organisations to address issues like FGM and enforced child marriage. Last year we launched the Jo Cox memorial grants which include a focus on women's social, economic and political empowerment.

The Girls Not Brides partnership was mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Goudie. I met the chair, Princess Mabel, in Vancouver—she is a very impressive woman. The partnership is a key partner on ending child marriage. For example, we recently organised a joint seminar on evidence and interventions for preventing child marriage and we will continue that relationship.

I am running out of time and I am sorry that I did not get to talk about periods or many other subjects, but I will follow everything up in writing because there is a lot more to say. I thank everyone for contributing to this debate. Looking ahead, we have a number of opportunities coming up to keep this issue firmly on the global agenda. I am certainly committed to doing so, as is the department and the Government. We have a number of conferences coming up and our next phase of engagement on initiatives such as FP2020, but we must and can do more. We will continue to champion the rights of women and girls in everything we do at DfID.

*Motion agreed.*

## Hospitals: Listeria

### Statement

5.52 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford) (Con):** My Lords, with the leave of the House, I shall now repeat in the form of a Statement the Answer to an Urgent Question given by my right

honourable friend the Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Care. The Statement is as follows:

“Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the actions that the Government are taking to protect the public following cases of listeria in hospitals linked to contaminated food. The NHS has identified nine confirmed cases of listeria in seven different hospitals between 14 April and 28 May this year, all of them linked to contaminated sandwiches from a single supplier. All of the known cases involved in-patients and, very sadly, five people have died. I would like to express my condolences to the families of those who have lost loved ones and I promise that there will be a full and thorough investigation, and severe consequences if there is any evidence of wrongdoing.

Laboratory testing indicated a link between two cases in Manchester Royal Infirmary and one case in Liverpool. Contaminated sandwiches were identified as the likely cause by Public Health England. The manufacturer, the Good Food Chain, and its supplier, North Country Cooked Meats, have withdrawn the sandwiches and voluntarily ceased supply of all products on 7 June. They are both complying with the Food Standards Agency on a full product withdrawal.

The other cases have been identified at the Royal Derby, Worthing, William Harvey in Ashford, Wexham, Leicester Royal Infirmary, and St Richard’s in Chichester. The risk to the public is very low, but any patients or members of the public with concerns should contact NHS 111, or 999 if they experience severe symptoms.

Listeria infection in healthy people may cause mild illness but is rarely fatal. However, for certain groups it can be much more serious, as we have tragically seen. The NHS, Public Health England and the Food Standards Agency have acted swiftly to identify, contain and investigate the cause of this listeria outbreak. These deaths should never have happened. People rightly expect to be safe and looked after in hospitals, and we must ensure that we take the necessary steps to restore the trust the public deserve to be able to have.

This is about ensuring not just that the food we serve in hospitals is safe—the NHS served 140 million main meals to in-patients last year—but that the food given to patients is healthy and nutritious and aids their recovery. I can inform the House that we are launching a root-and-branch review of all the food in our hospitals, both the food served and the food sold.

The Government will work with the NHS to build on the progress in three vital areas. The first area is eliminating junk food from hospitals. Since the introduction of the NHS Action on Sugar scheme, we have halved the sale of high-sugar soft drinks, and trusts are taking action to remove unhealthy food and drink and replace it with healthier alternatives. After all, hospitals are places for good health.

The second area is improving nutrition. New national standards for all healthcare food will be published this year. All patient menus will have to ensure that minimum patient nutrition standards are met.

The third area is healthier choices. We will work more closely with the Hospital Caterers Association and others to ensure that healthier food choices are available across the NHS.

The review will identify where we need to do more, where we need to do better to improve the quality of food in our hospitals and how we can help people to make healthier choices. I know this is an issue that many colleagues in the House will feel strongly about, as do the public. We will do everything we can to ensure that the food we eat in hospitals is both safe and healthy”.

5.56 pm

**Lord Tunncliffe (Lab):** My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister for repeating the Answer to this Urgent Question. Our thoughts and deepest sympathies are with the families of those who have tragically died as a result of the outbreak and those who have fallen sick.

Professor Jose Vazquez-Boland, chair of infectious diseases at the University of Edinburgh, warned in the media over the weekend that:

“Pre-packed sandwiches are recurrently incriminated in the UK in listeriosis episodes”.

This is a concerning revelation, with potentially widespread implications for food packaging, storage and distribution.

Over the weekend the Health Secretary announced that he had ordered a “root-and-branch” review of hospital food. Can the Minister outline exactly what this review will entail and when it is expected to report back? Does the Minister believe the review should be industry-wide, given that the supplier, the Good Food Chain, also supplies sporting venues, businesses and universities nationwide?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** I thank the noble Lord, Lord Tunncliffe, for his question. The purpose of the review is to build on previous work and to implement standards for higher-quality food for NHS patients. It will take a root-and-branch approach and will follow the evidence where it can make improvements. The terms of reference are to work with the NHS and stakeholders; they are currently under development, but will be shared with Parliament as soon as they are set in place.

I can also reassure the noble Lord on the question he raised about the products. While GFC manufactures a range of products, in the consumption data gathered from case records only sandwiches were identified as having been consumed. It is therefore anticipated that the review targeted at the NHS is the right approach.

**Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD):** My Lords, like the noble Lord, Lord Tunncliffe, my thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who died. It is clearly right, as the Secretary of State said in his Statement, that people expect to be safe and looked after in hospitals. Yet the Answer to the Urgent Question seems to spend rather a time talking about healthy food and other wider issues. This is an urgent issue. What will happen urgently to ensure that similar situations cannot happen again? Getting rid of sugar may be important, but ensuring that listeria is not present is vital. What necessary steps will be taken to restore trust urgently? I am sure that we all welcome the Secretary of State back to his full-time job now that he has stopped trying to be leader of his party.

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** I am sure that the noble Baroness would like to hear exactly how effectively Public Health England and others responded in this case. Obviously, these cases should not have occurred in the first place, but the first case occurred on 26 April. There were two cases in one hospital. The second case in a different hospital did not occur until 16 May. It took one week for Public Health England to ascertain that this was a national issue and that the cases were indeed linked. Thereafter, products were withdrawn. Very swift action was taken by Public Health England and the Food Standards Authority and a clear and concerted investigation is now under way. It will be made clear that this sort of thing cannot happen again and that there will be severe consequences for any companies that do not take careful consideration of the consequences if they do.

**Lord Patel (CB):** My Lords, several important points come out of this tragic incident of five people dying from listeria infections. The first is how quickly we can get a diagnosis of listeria in the food products that are contaminated. Older tests take several days but there are other tests, so I ask the Minister whether rapid diagnosis tests are available. Secondly, if people are infected with listeria monocytogenes it is quite dangerous, so the death of the people concerned may be related to that infection. It is important that the food in the supply chain is tested. Some countries adopt a regulation that requires regular testing of food in the environment where food such as sandwiches is packaged. In the review that will be conducted, will we look at the possibility of such regulation?

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford:** I thank the noble Lord, Lord Patel. He is absolutely right that one reason why such fast action was able to be taken was that it was possible to confirm by whole genome sequencing that cases at Manchester and Liverpool were linked by an identical strain in a week. Previously, that would have taken an awful lot longer, so we can be pleased that action was taken much quicker.

In terms of lessons learned, the noble Lord is right that we need to look at how to ensure that local authorities undertake inspections and audits of sites that are approved and that we also collect samples every six months and take action on any results of concern. We must make sure that the NHS follows food safety advice from Public Health England and the Food Standards Authority. Public Health England has confirmed that serving sandwiches in hospitals—I apologise. I am going to faint.

6.04 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## **Whirlpool Tumble Dryers: Product Recall** *Statement*

6.14 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Henley) (Con):** My Lords, with the leave of the House, I shall now repeat in the form of a Statement the Answer to an Urgent Question given by my honourable friend the Minister for Small Business:

“The Government take the safety of electrical products very seriously. For our children, our relatives and our families, we all want our homes to be places of safety and security. I provided an update to the House, at departmental Questions last week, on the most recent step taken by the Office for Product Safety and Standards in relation to Whirlpool tumble dryers. This follows the OPSS review of the actions taken by Whirlpool in relation to its corrective action. The findings of the review were published on 4 April.

The OPSS review examined, in detail, the modification programme put in place by Whirlpool, as well as technical documents supplied by Whirlpool. The review concluded that the risk posed by modified tumble dryers is low. The Office for Product Safety and Standards produced a list of required actions for the business to take and Whirlpool was given 28 days to respond, outlining the actions that it would take.

The response received from Whirlpool was considered to be inadequate. As a result, the OPSS has written to Whirlpool to inform the company of its intention to serve a recall notice under the provisions of the General Product Safety Regulations 2005, in respect of the unmodified tumble dryers that remain in homes in the UK.

As required by law, Whirlpool was given 10 days’ notice of that intention. The 10 days allowed Whirlpool to submit its views prior to the service of the recall notice or to seek arbitration in line with the provisions under the GPSR. Officials in the OPSS are reviewing Whirlpool’s response to determine whether it fully meets the requirements laid down in the draft recall notice.

At this time all enforcement options remain on the table, including serving a formal recall notice. It would be inappropriate for me to comment further while the legal process is ongoing. I will update the House in due course.

It is important to stress that consumers who have had their affected tumble dryers modified can continue to use them. Those with an unmodified affected tumble dryer have been urged to unplug them and to contact Whirlpool. I encourage all consumers to register their appliances to ensure they receive updates on product modifications and recalls.

The OPSS will continue to monitor this situation closely and will take any steps it deems appropriate to ensure that consumers in the UK continue to enjoy the high levels of protection they have come to expect”.

My Lords, that concludes the Statement.

6.17 pm

**Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab):** My Lords, while thanking the Minister for repeating the Statement, I find it rather complacent. Whirlpool and the Government have rather dillied and dallied over this, despite tumble dryers causing a third of fires started by appliances; that is probably three per day.

Even now, with a belated recall covering only 500,000 of the affected machines, there is no list of the models available and Whirlpool refuses to release these details. The Minister urges people, “with an unmodified, affected tumble dryer ... to unplug them and to contact Whirlpool”.

But consumers do not know whether their dryer is one of those affected, and even the charity Electrical Safety First has been denied the list. So consumers have first to find a serial number, which is not always easy, and then go on to a website and type in the serial number to even see whether their machine is affected. This is not good enough. Will the Government either compel Whirlpool to come clean with a list of the affected models, or publish the list themselves, because we know they have it?

**Lord Henley:** My Lords, I am not sure where the noble Baroness gets her figures, but they were faintly alarmist. She claimed that a third of all fires caused by domestic appliances were caused by tumble dryers. The figures I have show that the number of fires caused by domestic tumble dryers is coming down. There were only 724 last year, down from 808 the previous year—a 10% fall. I am told that in the figures for 2017-18, if you take all domestic appliances, some 16,000 fires were caused by electric appliances—so tumble dryers did not cause a third of them, as the noble Baroness claimed.

I will not defend Whirlpool, but it has mounted a fairly large operation to try to identify where the appliances are. It is reckoned that Whirlpool has got to something like 50% of the tumble dryers that need to be looked at, and there are probably another 500 or 1,000 or so to get at. We welcome Whirlpool's response on what it is doing to identify those machines, get at them and make the appropriate modifications. As I said in the Statement, the number of fires in modified appliances is significantly lower than in those that have not been modified. I must repeat that the manufacturer has the responsibility to ensure product safety, and it should be for the Government—which is what we have done here—to take the appropriate action to hold it to account.

**Lord Razzall (LD):** My Lords, I have one small point and two questions. My small point is that I am very glad that the noble Baroness, Lady Neville-Rolfe, is in her place, because she has been fighting this campaign for as long as I can remember. Whether she regards this as progress we will see when she rises to her feet.

I turn to my first question. I know that the Minister has been trading numbers with the Labour Benches, but the government information is that 750 fires in the last 11 years have been caused by tumble dryers. Bearing in mind that we are very close to the anniversary of the Grenfell fire, will the Government confirm that they are taking all steps to ensure that tumble dryers in tower blocks will no longer provide any threat of further fires?

My second question, which is not surprising coming from these Benches, is: will the Minister confirm that, whatever the terms of Brexit—whether it is with no deal or a new deal—the health and safety issues regarding tumble dryers will be as strong as they are today with regard to imported dryers?

**Lord Henley:** My Lords, all I can say is that I await my noble friend's question in due course. As for the number of fires caused, I quoted the figure, saying

that some 724 last year were caused by tumble dryers but that that was a decline. One must remember that any white goods are going to have a risk, and the important thing is that manufacturers ensure that they are as risk-free as possible. That is why on this occasion, as I said, we want to hold Whirlpool to account and ensure that it gets to as many machines as possible to make sure that they are dealt with. However, it is right and proper that we not only deal with tumble dryers where there is a problem but ensure the safety of all other white goods.

On the question of our exit from the EU, I assure the noble Lord that the department will make sure that safety remains an absolute priority in dealing with these matters. Ensuring that we have a robust system of market surveillance to make sure that we can protect our border from unsafe products will be a priority for the department.

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con):** I was very glad to hear of the recall, albeit it is rather late in the process. It is, I think, three and a half years since these fires were first identified, and I hope we will learn from the process.

I have two questions for my noble friend. As the department knows, because they were very helpful, I have two Whirlpool tumble dryers. In fact, they are Hotpoint; as noble Lords will know, Hotpoint was taken over by Whirlpool, a US company. The second was modified only after my meeting with the Minister. In the Statement my noble friend suggested that the risk from modified tumble dryers was low. There have been examples of fires in modified dryers, though, so how can the Government be sure that they are safe? Modifying the dryers is quite a long process, as I observed it for two hours on my lawn.

My second question, which I think is the more important one, is: is the system for the recall of white goods good enough, given the danger to the British consumer if there are fires? What changes have the Government made, or are they planning, to ensure that we can sleep safely in our beds?

**Lord Henley:** My Lords, on my noble friend's first point, I can confirm, as I said in the Statement, that the risk from modified tumble dryers is low. I cannot quantify it, but I can repeat that assurance. It is certainly an improvement on what was there before. As I said in response to the noble Lord, Lord Razzall, one can never remove all risks with white goods; obviously, any electrical product inherently has some danger. However, we must do what we can—or rather, manufacturers must do what they can—to ensure that all products are as safe as possible. It is then the Government's job to hold those manufacturers to account.

My noble friend also asked whether the system was good enough. We will always keep the system under review. We introduced the Office for Product Safety and Standards a little over a year ago and we will monitor how it is going. If one looks at the figures for domestic fires, including those caused by electrical products, and sees their steady decline, one can say that we are heading in the right direction. This has been happening for some time.

**Lord Scriven (LD):** My Lords, the National Fire Chiefs Council, which is the council of the country's chief fire officers, does not think that the scheme is good enough. Since 2017, it has been asking for a single government-backed recall register for white goods. Why are the Government still dragging their feet on this and not doing a proper assessment?

**Lord Henley:** My Lords, there would be considerable difficulties in setting up such a register, but we note what the noble Lord and national fire officers have said on this matter and we will consider it. I think we have a pretty good system. We set up the OPSS in January last year. As I said, we will continue to monitor how that works and do what we can to hold manufacturers to account.

**Baroness Donaghy (Lab):** My Lords, if the chief fire officers, the Fire Brigades Union, trading standards officers and a number of other consumer groups have all been incredibly critical of the system we have had for not just three and a half years but many more, with companies such as Whirlpool getting away with it, can we really say that the system is satisfactory? Can the Government not do a proper review and ensure that these goods are not risking lives? I am very grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Razzall, for raising the fact that a white goods issue started the Grenfell fire—that all

seems to have gone rather quiet. I do not think the Government have a sense of urgency about this. In light of the comments from all those who actually know what they are talking about, who are asking for better safety regulations, the Government should sit down and do their job.

**Lord Henley:** My Lords, I reject the noble Baroness's accusation that we are being complacent on this matter. It is not my job to defend Whirlpool and I accept that it has not been as fast as it might have been, but the Government have certainly held it to account. Whirlpool has at least got to some 50% of the tumble dryers it is looking at, which is far better than any other similar recall process; I understand that 10% to 20% is normally expected in programmes of this sort. Whirlpool has made progress, but the Government feel it can do more and that is why my honourable friend took the action she did and why we are holding it to account.

**Lord Porter of Spalding (Con):** My Lords, surely the Minister has just answered his own question—

**Viscount Younger of Leckie (Con):** My Lords, the time for Back-Bench questions is up. I beg to move that the House do now adjourn.

*House adjourned at 6.29 pm.*