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**UNITED KINGDOM PLEDGES TO ENSURE ABORTION ACCESS FOR WOMEN
RAPED IN WAR**

January 10, 2013 [NEW YORK, NY] The United Kingdom (UK) announced a historic change in their policy on abortions for women raped in armed conflict, a move that should have enormous global impact on health care given women in war zones. UK government spokesperson, Baroness Northover, speaking in the House of Lords on January 9, 2013, acknowledged that girls and women raped in armed conflict have absolute legal rights to comprehensive medical care, including abortions when medically necessary, under common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions.

Global Justice Center President Janet Benshoof states, “We applaud the UK for its global leadership on calling an end to the unjust and illegal denial of abortions for women raped and tortured in armed conflict.”

The UK now joins with Norway in calling to ensure abortions are part of medical treatment for women raped in war, and for calling on the US to lift the abortion restrictions placed on all US humanitarian aid funds. Norway was the first country to affirm that nondiscriminatory medical care under the Geneva Conventions must include abortions, and in 2011 called upon the US government to lift its abortion ban on aid for women raped in war as a matter of compliance with the Geneva Conventions.

Baroness Northover’s statement laid out several ways the UK government would protect the medical care rights of women victims of war rape:

- Acknowledge that international humanitarian law, not national abortion laws, is the legal standard to be followed when treating victims of war rape.
- Officially ask the US government to reinterpret the Helms Amendment abortion restrictions put on foreign aid to allow for abortions for women raped in armed conflict.
- Continue to flag its position supporting the legal rights to abortion for women raped in war to the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has an abortion ban attached to its US funding.
- Affirm that all recipients of UK humanitarian aid funding must use that funding in compliance with international humanitarian law, where applicable.

This turnaround in UK policy came in response to a historic call by Lord Anthony Lester of Herne Hill for the UK to take global leadership to end the routine denial of “life and health saving abortions in humanitarian settings” for girls and women raped in war. Lord Lester called the denial of abortions for women raped in war “barbaric,” stating that it leaves victims with “the terrible ‘choice’ of risking an unsafe abortion, suicide, or being forced to bear the child of their rapists.”

Other peers advocating for the UK to ensure that its humanitarian aid policy includes abortion access for war rape victims included: Baroness Kinnock, who referenced her firsthand experience meeting with war rape victims in the Democratic Republic of Congo; Baroness Kennedy; Lord Collins; Baroness Tonge; Baroness Uddin; and Baroness Flather, who cited the recent gang rape case in India that has sparked international outcry, and concluded by stating, “It is time that we in this country decided that all our money should go to save and to serve women. That is what I would like to see. It is time to stop pussyfooting around and to do something about it.”

Lauding this UK policy change, Ms. Benshoof adds: “All donor countries should join the UK in protecting the medical care rights of women raped in armed conflict. Women must not be forced to bear the child of their rapists.”

To read the full transcript of the debate, click here:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldhansrd/text/130109-0002.htm#13010975000273>

To watch the live debate, click here (the debate starts at 19:59:00):

<http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/Player.aspx?meetingId=12179>

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