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As you are only too aware, every year sees far too many horrendous acts of violence against women and girls, most recently the horrific rape and killing of a young woman in Delhi. This deep-seated gender based violence is a global problem, including in the UK where our government is taking steps to combat violence against women.

This year we have a unique opportunity to turn the tide on this enduring tragedy: women no longer suffering in solitary silence but coming together in communities, countries and across the world to realise their right to a life free from violence. The UK welcomes UN Women's vital role in this effort and we strongly support its work to prevent violence against women and girls.

We must work together to galvanise a global consensus to end all forms of violence against women and the culture of impunity associated with it. We have the perfect opportunity in March with the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW57), focused on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. We owe it to every girl and woman around the world to send a clear and unambiguous signal that the world stands with them. It is the responsibility of the international community to ensure we agree strong conclusions at this year's CSW, avoiding a repeat of last year's failure to reach any conclusions at all.

But alongside this political commitment, we must also take concrete action to change the lives of women and girls.

We know that educating a girl not only transforms her life, but that of her family, her community and ultimately her country. This week the UK Government's Girls Education Challenge is providing £168.4m to 14 new programmes which will support the education of at least 555,000 girls from some of the most rural and deprived communities in Africa and Asia.

We know also that access to family planning can, literally, transform lives. Women must be able to decide freely, and for themselves, whether, when and how many children they have. That is why, last year, the UK, with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, hosted the London Summit on Family Planning, which aimed to enable an additional 120 million girls and women to use Family Planning by 2020.

The UK Government holds the Presidency of the G8 in 2013 and through our Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative we will press this year for a much stronger international effort to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict, to erode the culture of impunity, to increase the number of perpetrators brought to justice both internationally and nationally, and to build the capacity of countries to tackle such crimes.

The international discussions on the framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals after 2015 also offer a real opportunity to embed and sustain this work.

So the UK will continue to play its part to support women and girls, including in the poorest parts of the world. I know many others are doing so as well. With strong leadership from UN Women, and from governments around the world, I believe 2013 can be the year that we come together to deliver a step change in preventing and tackling violence against women and girls.

JUSTINE GREENING