

## **F26 Tackling Violence Against Women**

Mover: Rt Hon Tom Brake MP (Co-Chair, Parliamentary Party Committee on Home Affairs, Justice and Equalities)

Conference notes with concern that:

- I. Last year alone there were over one million female victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales.
- II. Only 10% of local authorities offer dedicated specialist services for Black and Minority Ethnic women, even though ethnic minority women are vulnerable to specific forms of violence such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage.
- III. 70% of women seeking asylum in the UK have suffered rape or other sexual violence.
- IV. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Children said with respect to the UK: "The state should always consider child victims of these criminal practices, including child prostitution, exclusively as victims in need of recovery and not as offenders".
- V. A Refuge study showed an alarming prevalence of attitudes that reinforce violence against women: for example, that over 75 per cent of 11-12 year olds thought it was acceptable for women to be hit if they make men angry.

Conference believes that:

- i) Violence against women is a violation of human rights.
- ii) Violence against women is both a cause and a consequence of deep-rooted inequality between women and men.
- iii) All women have the right to live free from fear, abuse and exploitation.
- iv) While the Government's current efforts to end violence against women and girls are to be welcomed, there is still more than can be done.
- v) Any approach to tackling Violence Against Women must take a cross-governmental approach, ensuring that there is a focus on prevention; that victims are not blamed or criminalized; and that individuals are empowered to break free from abusive situations or relationships.

Conference therefore welcomes:

- A. The launch of the Government's cross-department, strategic action plan, Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls, and in particular its statement that "our approach to tackling violence against women and girls is a test of this Government's capability to build a fairer society".
- B. The policies that have resulted from this action plan, including, amongst others, the £28m stable funding the Home Office has committed for funding of specialist rape services over the next four years: providing more training and early intervention programmes, and better support for victims.
- C. The Government's decision to opt in to the European Union Directive on Human Trafficking, which significantly strengthens the assistance offered to victims of human trafficking and the ability of the UK to prosecute perpetrators, and also to the proposed EU European Protection Order which will enhance cross-border safety for domestic violence victims.

D. The appointment of a Liberal Democrat Minister, Lynne Featherstone MP, as the Government's International Violence Against Women champion.

Conference nevertheless calls on the Government to act further to achieve its objectives by:

1. Seeking to prevent violence happening in the first place through work towards culture change, including:

a) Using all means available to raise awareness of the issues including through the education of children in relationships and consent, and training of teachers.

b) Tackling the projection of women as sex objects to children and adolescents by restricting sexualised images in newspapers and general circulation magazines to the same rules that apply to pre-watershed broadcast media.

2. Protecting victims through:

a) Ending the criminalisation of child prostitutes.

b) Training agencies and border officials to identify vulnerable applicants and handle delicate cases, including recognising that the trauma suffered by victims may not immediately manifest itself, and that for some women and girls specialised support and time to recover are essential.

c) Issuing guidance to prosecutors and judges to prevent women suffering from domestic violence, who have retracted their evidence against their partner because of fear and intimidation, from being prosecuted for false allegations.

d) Enabling vulnerable families to stay together by implementing the Corston Recommendations, which would see a gradual closure of all women's prisons and their replacement with some small custodial units for serious and dangerous offenders, and, for most women offenders, a larger network of support and supervision centres in the community.

3. Empowering women through:

a) Providing better and more supportive systems in schools and social services (such as health visitors and midwives) through which women and children can report abuse.

b) Allowing those who have escaped abusive relationships and are living in refuges to continue to work and remain economically independent.

c) Retaining services for ethnic minority women so that those who need culturally specific services feel able to ask for help.

d) Requiring all licensed sex establishments to advertise a free-phone hotline, where clients could report concerns and victims could self-report.

4. Taking an international approach through working towards signing the Council of Europe Convention on Violence Against Women, which would further strengthen our domestic efforts to combat violence against women.