

Joint Women's Aid Letter to MPs – Istanbul Convention Private Members Bill

Dear Members of Parliament,

All of us have the right to live free from violence and abuse. Yet violence against women taints all of our communities throughout the United Kingdom; it is rife in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Available data for 2015 shows that 123 women in the UK were known or suspected to have been killed by men. This means that one woman was killed every three days. Every three days: week in and week out. Families robbed of daughters, sisters, aunts. Children robbed of their mothers. 123 lives taken away and countless more destroyed by loss and grief. Meanwhile, a quarter of women experience domestic abuse in the UK – and those are just the cases that are reported.

Violence against women is a major social crisis. But we have within our grasp the opportunity to do more to protect women and girls. How? By ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – the Istanbul Convention.

The Istanbul Convention is the first international treaty to specifically make violence and abuse against women and girls illegal. It sets legal standards for tackling most forms of violence against women – physical, sexual, emotional or financial – as well as stalking, forced marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Four years ago, the UK Government signed this historic Convention, signalling their commitment to ending violence against women – a beacon of hope for us all. But without ratification, the Convention is just a piece of paper.

Survivors need security, support, advice and counselling, provided by specialist services – like the services run by hundreds of Women's Aid groups across the UK. These services, and the knowledge of their workers, give women and children the space and tools to rebuild healthy and independent lives. They provide specialist support and hope for tens of thousands of children experiencing domestic abuse, making sure their rights are protected and their voices are heard. Often, these services are run by survivors themselves – women who know what it means to leave an abusive partner. They are experts, providing the best service possible to those who come to them for help, and demand for their help remains sky-high. The Istanbul Convention makes access to these specialist services a right.

But in the UK, these life-saving services are at risk, and in some places are in crisis. Weakened by funding cuts, for many their futures are uncertain. Insecure funding is the single most important concern for services nationwide.

On the 16th of December, Members of Parliament have an incredible opportunity to change this - to make history, and to save lives. We are asking you to seize it. If 100 MPs attend the Second Reading debate of the Private Members Bill on the Istanbul Convention, we will be one step closer to ratifying it.

We stand united in asking you, as Members of Parliament and as representatives of women victims and survivors everywhere, to attend this debate on the 16th of December and #ChangeHerstory. Protect these life-saving services and the women and children that depend on them.

Yours sincerely,