

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Home Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF  
United Kingdom

By email: [public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk)

30 May 2022

Dear Rt Hon Priti Patel MP,

**Ten years after signing, the UK must ratify the Istanbul Convention without reservations**

We are writing to you as a coalition of more than 80 organisations ahead of the 10-year anniversary of the UK signing the Istanbul Convention on 8 June, to urge the Government to ratify the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence **without reservations**.

**Recent Government announcement on ratification**

We welcome the Government's announcement that it will ratify the Istanbul Convention. However, we are disappointed that, almost a decade after signing the Convention, the Government has committed to its ratification with reservations.

There is strong support for ratification, including firm cross-party backing in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, ongoing championing from women's sector organisations, and a call from now over 19,000 signatories to a petition calling on the Government to finally take this critical step.

This support is based on the **ratification of the entire Convention**, not for the creation of a two-tier system, where migrant women are given a lesser status and lesser protections.

**Article 59 provides a lifeline for migrant women survivors**

We are extremely concerned by the decision to make a reservation on Article 59, which requires member states to grant residence to victims whose immigration status depends on an abusive partner.

This reservation, which denies migrant women survivors life-saving support, would be disastrous for them. It will mean migrant women, who will be some of the most reliant on the protections of the Convention, will be excluded from it. This is in direct opposition to the spirit of the Convention, which is firmly based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

There is a wealth of existing evidence about the need for Article 59 to provide vital support for migrant women experiencing violence. This evidence, provided by numerous specialist 'led by and for' Black and minoritised women's organisations, during the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act, clearly established the gap in support for migrant victims of domestic abuse whose residency was connected with their abuser and had no recourse to public funds. Despite this, the Government failed to secure equal protection and support for migrant women through this legislation - and it is failing to do so again through its approach to ratification.

The UK's position on Article 59 has been under review pending the conclusion and evaluation of the short-term pilot Support for Migrant Victims Scheme. This Scheme was launched on 1 April 2021 and delivered by a UK-wide partnership led by Southall Black Sisters. Initially, the pilot was funded for one year, and now has been extended to another year, ending March 2023. We are expecting the findings of the external evaluation for year one of the pilot to be published this summer.

Despite the 10-year delay in ratification, the Government has stated they do not want to delay on the basis of this pilot scheme and the evidence it will produce, and as a result has decided to ratify by applying a reservation to the whole of Article 59. In doing so, it reinforces the power of the perpetrators and increases the risk faced by migrant survivors. It also flies in the face of the advice and expertise of the specialist 'led by and for' Black and minoritised women's organisations who have been clear that ratification without reservations does not need to be dependent on the findings of the pilot scheme evaluation.

### **Survivor's testimony**

*"I am Brazilian, a mother and a nurse. I chose a name to represent myself. You can call me "Phoenix" because that's exactly how I feel: reborn from the ashes.*

*It all started in 2015 when I met a man through my family. He was here in England and I was in Brazil. In 2016 we started dating. In 2017 we got engaged in London. In 2018, I arrived here with my eldest son who had just turned 5 at the time, and with so many dreams. I would finally be by the side of the person I loved. But all of my dreams, plans and expectations became a sad and endless nightmare.*

*What was supposed to be normal was completely inhuman and cruel. He and I never lived together after I arrived. Our marriage was never consolidated. We met once a*

*month. I was living with six people and my son and I shared a room and the same bed. Three months later, the pill failed and I was expecting a baby. My world had just collapsed.*

*Each day that passed was worse than the previous one. He came home drunk in the late hours and his behaviour towards me became more and more violent. Fifteen days after my baby's birth, I discovered he had another relationship. After that, I was reported to immigration control by his ex-wife.*

*I felt trapped, like a wounded and helpless animal. No job, no money, with no immigration status, not speaking English, nothing. I had nothing to cling to. My passport had been taken away from me. My two-months-old baby still didn't have a birth certificate. It was very humiliating. My joy of living was gone. And I found myself talking to death several times. I was referred to the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS). There, I met an angel, who was responsible for getting me up, restructuring little by little. Together, we were rebuilding each foundation, with great dedication, love and exceptional work. She gave me strength, support and protection. She referred me to an immigration lawyer, who helped me to regularise my immigration status. My eternal gratitude to those who directly and indirectly gave me life again."*

The Government must put an end to the current two-tier system of protection for migrant survivors and demonstrate their commitment to tackling violence and abuse against **all** women.

### **Critical need for the Istanbul Convention**

Violence against women and girls is a serious and widespread issue across the UK. The Istanbul Convention, commended by UN Women and widely acknowledged as the 'gold standard' approach, provides the most comprehensive survivor-centred roadmap we have for addressing this epidemic. It is an essential tool for any government serious about tackling violence against women and girls. However, women need the Government to deliver on its commitment in 2012 and *fully* ratify the Istanbul Convention.

We urge the Government to address the current gaps in protection and ensure equal support for migrant women by ratifying the Istanbul Convention in full and removing the reservation on Article 59.

Should you like to discuss this further, we would be happy to meet with you.

Yours sincerely,

Andrea Simon, Director, **The End Violence Against Women Coalition**

Kathryn Dingle, Robyn Andréo-Boosey, and Lizzie Green, Co-directors, **IC Change**  
Elizabeth Jiménez-Yáñez, Coordinator, **Step Up Migrant Women Campaign**  
Laura Bates, Founder, **The Everyday Sexism Project**  
Bekah Legg, CEO, and Alan Storkey, Ambassador, **Restored**  
Estelle du Boulay, Director, **Rights of Women**  
Jo Todd, CEO, **Respect**  
Dr Nicola Sharp-Jeffs OBE, CEO, **Surviving Economic Abuse**  
Anthea Sully, Chief Executive, **White Ribbon UK**  
Liz Kelly, Director, **Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University**  
Naana Otoo- Oyorkey MBE, **Executive Director, FORWARD**  
Dr Shonagh Dillon, CEO **Aurora New Dawn**  
Harriet Wistrich, Director, **Centre for Women's Justice**  
Lisa-Marie Taylor, CEO, **FiLiA**  
Dr Annette Lawson, OBE, Chair, **The Judith Trust**, Ambassador, **NAWO**, Hon. Ambassador, **René Cassin**  
Tish Collins, Executive Director, **Associated Country Women of the World**  
Dr Kate Paradine, Chief Executive, **Women in Prison**  
Claire Moore, Director, **Certain Curtain Theatre Company** & organiser of the Dead Women Walking  
Diana Nammi, Executive Director, **IKWRO**  
Catherine Fookes, Director, **Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales**  
Pat Black, Chair, **National Alliance of Women's organisations UK**  
Dinah Musindarwezo, Director of Policy and Communications, **Womankind Worldwide**  
Gisela Valle, Director, **Latin American Women's Rights Service**  
Jayne Butler, CEO, **Rape Crisis England & Wales**  
Dr Helen Mott, **violence against women prevention specialist**  
Karen Ingala Smith, CEO, **Nia**  
Halaleh Taheri, Executive Director - **Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation (MEWSo)**  
Ms Souad Talsi, Founder and Interim CEO, **Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre**  
Sawsan Salim, Director, **Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation**  
Dr Marsha Scott, Chief Executive, **Scottish Women's Aid**

Gabriela Quevedo, Advocacy, Community and Learning Director, **Latin American Women's Aid**

Vicky Marsh, Interim Director, **Safety4Sisters**

Margaret Clark, **National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW) England and Wales**

Afrah Qassim, CEO and Founder, **Savera UK**

Bev Jullien, CEO, **Mothers' Union**

Minke van Til, Co-Director, **Ella's**

Barbara Cleary, Chair, **SecurityWomen**

Umme Imam, Executive Director, **Angelou Centre**

Alphonsine Kabagabo, Director, **Women for Refugee Women**

Dr Eleri Evans, Chair **Wales Assembly of Women**

Farah Nazeer, CEO, **Women's Aid Federation England**

Jacqui Hunt, Head of Office, London, **Equality Now**

Elsie Leadley, President, **National Council of Women of Great Britain**

Henry Pomeroy, Director, **CHASE Africa**

Jo Kinsey, **Business and Professional Women - UK**

Janet Veitch, Chair, **Women's Budget Group**

Ahlam Akram, Founder & Director, **British Arabs Supporting Universal Women's Rights**

Swadeka Ahsun, **Gender Peace & Security**

Britt Gustawsson, **Zonta London Club**

Zarin Hainsworth OBE, Chair, **UK Civil Society Women's Alliance**

Trustees, **Widows Rights International**

Sally Spear, **WAC-UNA UK**

Bianca Pitt, **SHE Changes Climate**

Claire Barnett, Executive Director, **UN Women UK**

Marienna Pope-Weidemann, **Justice For Gaia**

Rahila Gupta, **Southall Black Sisters**

Sara Kirkpatrick, CEO, **Welsh Women's Aid**

Mia Hasenson-Gross, Executive Director, **René Cassin**

Sonia Jalal, Founder, **Hull Sisters**

Baljit Banga, Executive Director, **Imkaan**

Andrew Copson, Chief Executive, **Humanists UK**

Yasmine Ahmed, UK Director, **Human Rights Watch**

Lisa Gormley, Visiting Fellow at **the Centre for Women, Peace and Security at LSE**, and a member of the Istanbul Convention drafting committee.

Yvonne MacNamara, CEO, **The Traveller Movement.**  
Heather Cooper, CEO, **KCRASAC**  
Nicky Harkin, CEO, **ARCH Teesside**  
Clare Hurst, Deputy Centre Director, **North East Law Centre**  
Carey Philpott, CEO, **SATEDA**  
Leni Morris, **Galop**  
Natasha Rattu, CEO, **Karma Nirvana**  
Kate Bradley, Campaigns Officer, **Greater Manchester Law Centre**  
Liz Thompson, Director of External Relations, **SafeLives**  
Katherine White, **Survivors' Network**  
Jemima Olchawski, Chief Executive, **The Fawcett Society**  
Miranda Reilly, Director, **The Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees**  
Melissa Green, General Secretary, **The Women's Institute (WI)**  
Sonya Sceats, Chief Executive, **Freedom from Torture**  
Liz Dominey, Chair **UKPAC, Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland**  
James Watson O'Neill, Chief Executive, **SignHealth**  
Ruth Davison, Chief Executive, **Refuge**  
Judith Banjoko, Interim CEO, **Solace**  
Jasmit Kaur Phull JP, President, **The British Federation of Women Graduates BFWG**  
Margaret Owen, Founder, **Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD)**  
Natalie Collins, Interim CEO, **The Women's Liberation Collective**