

Ian Blackford
Westminster Leader of the SNP
29 High Street,
Dingwall
IV15 9RU



15 November 2019

Dear Ian Blackford

Your policies to end violence against women and girls

We write to you as a UK-wide coalition of more than 90 women's organisations and others working to end the abuse of women and girls in all its forms. In advance of the General Election on 12 December, we would like you to set out your commitments to end all forms of violence against women and girls in the UK. We will publish your response on our website and share it, alongside responses from other party leaders.

Violence against women and girls is not inevitable, but it is enduring because it relates to women's persistent inequality. This election is taking place at a time of crisis in the criminal justice response to rape - even though more women than ever are coming forward to report to the Police, just 1.5% of cases in England and Wales are being prosecuted. Domestic abuse homicides are at their highest level for 5 years, reports of sexual harassment are reaching epidemic levels in our workplaces and education institutions, and many women MPs are leaving political careers citing online abuse and threats of violence against them as factors. These issues are deeply related and require urgent action by an incoming government.

If you consider tackling violence against women and girls a priority, we would like you to tell us how, if elected, you will:

1. Commit to renewing the cross-government Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy for England and Wales in 2020.
2. Ensure we have legislation which protects and supports all victims of domestic abuse in every part of the UK, and enables the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, with specific measures for BME and migrant survivors.
3. Make a high-profile priority of learning from the ongoing 'end to end' Rape Review of the criminal justice system's response to sexual violence in England and Wales which began in March 2019, so that survivors of sexual violence can be confident that there is real commitment to access to justice.
4. Ensure that every woman who needs support to escape or recover from domestic and sexual violence can access a specialist service, as well as trauma informed therapeutic support and counselling, by providing sustainable funding for the expert women's

support sector and ring-fenced funding for specialist services run 'by and for' BME and migrant women.

5. Appropriately resource and champion the roll-out of high-quality Relationships and Sex Education in all our schools.
6. Ensure there is clear legal duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment, including third party harassment; and step up work to prevent the on and offline abuse of women elected to public office, especially BME women who are disproportionately targeted. We also strongly recommend that UK Governments work together to ensure we can address online harms and introduce a regulator with teeth which can hold tech companies to account.
7. Ensure that all our public services - including the criminal justice system, welfare, housing, schools, health and immigration departments - make tackling violence against women and girls a clear, resourced and joined up priority across the UK.

Thank you for your attention to our letter. We look forward to receiving your response, please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions about our priorities or our work more broadly.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Green', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sarah Green
Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition