



Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

2 July 2019

Dear Jeremy Hunt MP,

**Re: Conservative Party Leadership Contest and Commitments to ending Violence Against Women and Girls**

We write as a wide range of UK women's organisations working to end all forms of violence against women and girls ('VAWG'), to ask if you will make specific commitments to improving the law, policy and practice on tackling gender-based violence if you become our next Prime Minister.

Over the last decade, progress has been made in responding to the different forms of abuse facing women and girls, but it is still the case that one in four women will experience domestic abuse and one in five will be sexually assaulted during her lifetime, with many experiencing abuse multiple times. Men and boys are also subjected to these forms of abuse, but women and girls are very disproportionately victimised as police and Government statistics show.

You will know, not least from your time leading the Department of Health, of the enormous social and individual harm caused by violence against women and girls, and how significantly these harms extend beyond the justice system and into health outcomes, economic prospects, and family and community life. These impacts are why we need specific policy to address abuse and leadership in order that women and girls are not held back and can live their lives as they choose.

We are living in an era of enormous changes in public recognition of and attitudes towards gender-based violence. Reporting to the police, and help-seeking from local support services, are at their highest ever levels and the #MeToo movement has exposed the huge scale of sexual harassment and violence. We hope you share with us a real desire to drive these social changes further, so that a real end to violence against women and girls might be in sight.

There is already a significant legislative and policy agenda under way to prevent and tackle gender-based violence, and we want to ask you as a candidate for Prime Minister to commit to maintaining and building on this work. The Home Office-led Violence Against Women and Girls

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Strategy for England and Wales is a critical framework, that complements equivalent strategies in Wales and Scotland. This encourages all government departments to play their part in ending abuse so that it is never again seen as purely a policing matter. It extends to the introduction of compulsory Relationships and Sex Education in 2020 in England, to complement mandatory SRE in the new curriculum in Wales, the new White Paper on online harms, and much of the proposed content of the Domestic Abuse Bill for England and Wales including the setting up of a critical new Commissioner in this area.

But there are also other issues which require urgent attention and new law and policy. Prosecution rates for rape have recently fallen catastrophically, even while reports to police are exponentially increasing. The Home Office and MOJ 'Rape Review' is committed to addressing this and needs high level political support to do so. Alongside this, rape survivors who are in a personal crisis are finding that waiting lists for counselling are closed due to very high demand. Fern Champion's petition to the current Prime Minister sets out why guaranteeing the availability of rape counselling is just as critical as ensuring the police and courts in this area work.

The problem of migrant women who cannot access protection or their rights because of the no recourse to public funds requirement also requires urgent attention, as they remain excluded from VAWG measures.

It is also the case that local domestic and sexual violence support services, which are a lifeline to thousands of women and children every year, are facing existential crisis due to the pressures of local cuts and competitive tendering. Those services built 'by and for' BME women have been particularly affected. We will all lose in the long-term if these organisations, which innovate and build the best standard of care for women are not properly sustained and resourced.

The next Prime Minister has a unique opportunity, at a unique time, to spearhead efforts to end gender- based violence. If elected the next leader of the Conservative Party and our new Prime Minister, will you commit to:

- Ensuring the parliamentary passage of a Domestic Abuse Bill for England and Wales is a priority so that it can become law soon;
- Renewing the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy from 2020 onwards and requiring your senior Cabinet Ministers across all departments to engage with it as a priority;
- Giving strong backing to the Home Office and MOJ as they conclude the 'Rape Review' later this year and monitor agencies response to recommendations from this review;
- Assemble a cross-departmental team to look at how UK government can recognise the critical value of specialist women's services supporting victims of VAWG, and ensure they are sustainable before any more are lost?

At a time of enormous political change in the UK, we believe that violence against women and girls deserves political attention and leadership because of the damage it does to thousands of

women's and girls' lives and all those who love them, which is why we have taken the time to write. We hope to hear from you soon. We will publish any reply we receive.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Green, Co-Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition

Fern Champion, Campaigner, [www.change.org/nosurvivorturnedaway](http://www.change.org/nosurvivorturnedaway)

Baljit Banga, Director, Imkaan

Adina Claire, Acting Co-Chief Executive, Women's Aid Federation England

Pragna Patel, Director, Southall Black Sisters

Estelle du Boulay, Director, Rights of Women

Yvonne Traynor, CEO, Rape Crisis South London and Rape Crisis Surrey & Sussex

Medina Johnson, Director, IRISi

Sandra Horley, Chief Executive, Refuge

Eleri Butler, Chief Executive, Welsh Women's Aid

Naana Otoo-Oyortey, Director, FORWARD

Somerset and Avon Rape and Sexual Abuse Support

Karen Ingala Smith, Chief Executive, nia

Jo Todd, Director, RESPECT

Nicole Jacobs, CEO, Standing Together

Professor Aisha K. Gill, Ph.D. CBE, Professor of Criminology and Co-Chair of EVAW

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