

## International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women: 25 November 2018

### United Nations Initiatives

In 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted the [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#), which the organisation UN Women describes as “the first international instrument explicitly addressing violence against women, providing a framework for national and international action”.<sup>1</sup> The declaration defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women. This includes threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. By [resolution 54/134](#) of 17 December 1999, the UN General Assembly designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women to raise public awareness of the issue.<sup>2</sup> Activists have marked 25 November as a day against violence since 1981 in commemoration of the assassination in 1960 of the three Mirabal sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic, on the orders of the Dominican ruler Rafael Trujillo for opposing his regime.<sup>3</sup>

In 2008, the UN Secretary General launched UNiTE to End Violence against Women, a campaign aiming to raise public awareness and increase political will and resources for preventing and ending all forms of violence against women and girls in all parts of the world.<sup>4</sup> The campaign designates the 25th day of each month as Orange Day, asking participants to wear orange to symbolise “a brighter future and a world free from violence against women and girls”.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of 16 days, from 25 November 2018 to International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2018, UNiTE to End Violence against Women will be running a campaign entitled ‘Orange the World: #HearMeToo’. The stated aim of the campaign is to raise awareness of different women’s movements around the world.<sup>6</sup>

### Facts and Figures

In 2015, the UN Statistics Division (UNSD) noted that there had been significant improvements in the availability of data on violence against women, but “significant challenges” remained in collecting data particularly for international comparison.<sup>7</sup> The UNSD argued this was due to factors such as the cost, different methodologies used in different countries, and differing willingness in different cultures to discuss experiences of violence.

The following statistics collated by UN Women in 2018 illustrate the scale and nature of the issue of violence against women around the world:

- It was estimated in 2013 that 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. However, some national studies show that up to 70% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime from an intimate partner.

- Worldwide, 650 million women alive in 2018 were married as children (defined as below 18 years of age). The rate of child marriages overall has decreased in recent years, with only one in five 20- to 24-year old women being married as children, compared to one in four in the previous decade. However, this rate varies around the world. In west and central Africa, for example, over four in ten young women were married before they reached 18 years of age.
- The UN Office on Drugs and Crime reported in 2016 that adult women accounted for almost half of all human trafficking victims detected globally. Women and girls together accounted for 71%, with girls representing two out of every three child trafficking victims.
- At least 200 million women and girls alive in 2016 had undergone female genital mutilation/cutting in 30 countries where representative data on prevalence was available.
- A 2014 survey, one in ten women in the European Union reported having experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15 (including having received unwanted, offensive, sexually explicit emails or SMS messages, or offensive, inappropriate advances on social networking sites).<sup>8</sup>

Violence against women has been identified by the UN as an obstacle to meeting its sustainable development goals. The UN sustainable development goals form part of the UN's 2030 agenda for sustainable development and are a successor to the millennium development goals. The UN has identified violence against women as an obstacle to achieving goal 5: gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.<sup>9</sup> The UN has stated that about one third of developing countries have not achieved gender parity in primary education and has argued child marriage is a key factor in preventing children and young women from receiving an education.<sup>10</sup>

## UK Action

In March 2016, Theresa May, the then Home Secretary, published the document [Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2016–2020](#). It estimated the UK economy lost £15.8 billion annually because of domestic violence through the lost economic output of women affected and the cost of providing public services to victims.<sup>11</sup> The strategy included four strands:

- prevention;
- provision of services;
- partnership working; and
- pursuing perpetrators.

The Government pledged to spend £80 million of dedicated funding over the spending review period from 2016/17 to 2019/20. This would provide support services, including the launch in 2017 of a violence against women and girls (VAWG) service transformation fund to support best local practice, and to provide funding from the VAT on sanitary products to support women's charities. In 2018, the Government said £17 million from the so-called 'tampon tax' had been provided to causes focusing on improving the lives of disadvantaged women and girls.<sup>12</sup>

The Government has committed to introduce legislation to reform the laws affecting domestic abuse victims. In February 2017, Liz Truss, the then Secretary of State for Justice, introduced the [Prisons and Courts Bill](#), which included provisions to end cross-examination of victims by the alleged perpetrator in the family courts for certain offences.<sup>13</sup> However, this bill did not complete its stages through Parliament because the 2017 general election was called. The Government has yet to reintroduce these provisions

in a separate bill. The Government introduced the [Secure Tenancies \(Victims of Domestic Abuse\) Bill](#) in December 2017, which provided for the victims of domestic abuse fleeing their home to retain any entitlement to a life-time tenancy when they were rehoused. This bill received royal assent in May 2018.

In the February 2017 Queen’s Speech, the Government said it would introduce a domestic violence and abuse bill. The bill would introduce a new statutory definition of domestic abuse.<sup>14</sup> It would also establish a domestic violence and abuse commissioner and, in cases where abusive behaviour involved a child, provide for sentencing to reflect “the devastating life-long impact that abuse has on the child”. The Government subsequently stated the draft bill would be published later in the 2017–19 session.<sup>15</sup> The Government has also stated the new bill would enable the UK to ratify the [Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence](#), also known as the Istanbul convention.<sup>16</sup> The UK signed the convention in 2012 but has yet to ratify it. The Government has said amendments to domestic law to take extra-territorial jurisdiction over a range of offences were necessary before ratifying the convention, and these provisions would be included in the new bill.<sup>17</sup>

Proposals to be included in the draft legislation were subject to a consultation between 8 March 2018 and 31 May 2018.<sup>18</sup> At the time of writing the Government had still to publish its response to this consultation. In its October 2018 report on domestic abuse, the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee welcomed the proposals in this consultation.<sup>19</sup> The committee argued the Government should go further and amend the law on all forms of violence against women and girls.<sup>20</sup> The committee welcomed a proposal from the Government to include economic abuse in its definition of domestic abuse. However, it criticised the Government’s welfare policies which it said were making it harder for victims to leave abusive partners. The committee argued the default single household payment for universal credit would reduce the independence of women who might be vulnerable to economic abuse.<sup>21</sup> The committee concluded there was a “desperate shortage of refuge accommodation available for victims and their children” and recommended that there should be a statutory responsibility upon local authorities to ensure sufficient refuge places were available.<sup>22</sup> It also recommended the Government include in its draft bill provisions prohibiting the cross-examination of an alleged victim by the alleged perpetrator of domestic abuse, previously included in the Prisons and Courts Bill.

## Further Information

- House of Commons Library, [Progress on Protecting Victims of Domestic Abuse](#), 13 July 2018
- End Violence Against Women, [Priorities for Government](#), 31 May 2018
- House of Lords Library, [International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict: 19 June](#), 14 June 2018
- House of Lords Library, [International Women’s Day: Steps Being Taken to Press for Gender Equality Globally](#), 28 February 2018
- House of Lords Library, [International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#), 23 November 2016
- Home Office, [Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence \(Istanbul Convention\): Report on Progress](#), November 2017
- Department for International Development, [Violence Against Women and Girls Helpdesk: Evidence Digest](#), July 2018
- Office for National Statistics, [‘Domestic Abuse in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2017’](#), 23 November 2017

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- <sup>1</sup> UN Women, '[Global Norms and Standards: Ending Violence Against Women](#)', accessed 15 November 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> United Nations, '[International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women: Background](#)', accessed 15 November 2018.
- <sup>3</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> UN Women, '[Say NO—UNiTE](#)', accessed 15 November 2018.
- <sup>5</sup> United Nations, '[International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#)', accessed 15 November 2018.
- <sup>6</sup> UNiTE to End Violence Against Women, '[Concept Note: Orange the World: #HearMeToo—UNiTE to End Violence Against Women Campaign's Initiative for 16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence](#)', 2018.
- <sup>7</sup> UN Statistics Division, '[Violence Against Women](#)' in *The World's Women 2015*, 2015, p 140.
- <sup>8</sup> UN Women, '[Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women](#)', accessed 15 November 2018.
- <sup>9</sup> United Nations, '[The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018](#)', 2018, p 6.
- <sup>10</sup> United Nations, '[Gender Equality: Why It Matters](#)', September 2018.
- <sup>11</sup> HM Government, '[Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2016–2020](#)', March 2016, p 9.
- <sup>12</sup> Home Office, '[Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Combating Violence Against Women and Girls and Domestic Violence \(Istanbul Convention\): 2018 Report on Progress](#)', October 2018, p 8. The Government is required by the provisions of the Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Ratification of Convention) Act 2017 to publish an annual report on its progress towards ratification of the Istanbul convention.
- <sup>13</sup> [HC Hansard, 23 February 2018, col 1183](#).
- <sup>14</sup> Cabinet Office, '[Queen's Speech 2017: Background Briefing Notes](#)', 21 June 2017.
- <sup>15</sup> House of Commons, '[Written Question: Domestic Violence](#)', 10 July 2018, 161097.
- <sup>16</sup> Home Office and Ministry of Justice, '[New Measures to Allow Ratification of Istanbul Convention](#)', 29 June 2017.
- <sup>17</sup> Home Office, '[Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Combating Violence Against Women and Girls and Domestic Violence \(Istanbul Convention\): 2018 Report on Progress](#)', October 2018, p 6.
- <sup>18</sup> Home Office and Ministry of Justice, '[Domestic Abuse Bill Consultation](#)', 28 March 2018.
- <sup>19</sup> House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, '[Domestic Abuse](#)', 22 October 2018, HC 1015 of session 2017–19.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p 3.
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

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