



MEDIA STATEMENT

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New National Taskforce on VAWG must turn knowledge into action

Muslim Women's Network UK's initial reaction to the announcement of a new government taskforce to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) was, 'why do we need a taskforce when women's organisations have spent years telling successive governments what the problems are and what needs to change?' However, a strong collective voice could be a powerful tool for holding the government to account. We hope ministers come to the taskforce with proposed solutions and action plans, rather than asking stakeholders to explain the problems all over again.

MWN UK CEO Baroness Shaista Gohir said: *"I particularly welcome the focus on prevention. Misogyny must be challenged before it escalates into abuse. Too often, the responsibility for safety is placed on women and girls, with questions about why they did not report abuse or seek help sooner. We need to turn those questions around and ask: what are we doing, or failing to do, that allows abuse to happen and continue? And, most importantly, what must we do so that women and girls are not harmed in the first place?"*

For a step change to occur, tackling VAWG must be everyone's business. This must include robustly tackling sexual harassment in schools, colleges and universities; holding technology companies accountable for algorithms that amplify misogyny; ensuring stronger and swifter consequences for perpetrators; and involving men and boys in changing attitudes and behaviour. The media also has an important role to play, including how it reports violence against women and frames headlines about victims and perpetrators.

We also hope the new taskforce will not view violence against minority ethnic women primarily through a cultural lens. Too often, the focus has been on forms of abuse regarded as culturally specific, such as forced marriage, so-called honour-based abuse and female genital mutilation, while intimate partner violence and sexual violence receive far less attention. The disproportionate representation of minority ethnic women, particularly Black women, among domestic homicide victims must not continue to be overlooked because of stereotypes.

MWN UK CEO Baroness Shaista Gohir said: *"Minority ethnic women are far more likely to be affected by intimate partner and sexual violence than by culturally specific forms of abuse, yet we have not seen the same targeted government-funded prevention campaigns that we have seen on FGM, forced marriage and honour-based abuse. That imbalance needs to change."*

The real test of this taskforce will be whether it delivers a clear, time-bound action plan that turns that knowledge into action

Anyone experiencing any form of violence or abuse can contact the Muslim Women's Network Helpline on 0800 999 5786 or via info@mwnhelpline.co.uk

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