

13th January 2015

PRESS RELEASE

New National Helpline Aimed at Helping Muslim women and girls

The **Muslim Women's Network UK** (MWNUK) has established and will operate a **new national helpline** aimed at **Muslim women and girls** who are suffering from or at risk of abuse or facing problems. The Muslim Women's Network (MWN) Helpline is being launched on the **14th January 2015** in Birmingham at the 'Women – Media, Sexism and Online Abuse' event organised in partnership with the **Government Equalities Office**.

Jo Swinson, the Minister for Women and Equalities, who will be attending the launch said: *"Violence towards women and girls is never acceptable, and we all need to do more to ensure that no one has to live in fear of violence or harassment. The helpline provided by the Muslim Women's Network will be a valuable resource to vulnerable women, and is a vital step to raising awareness of the number at people at risk of, and suffering from, abuse."*

Culture often poses a barrier to seeking help because of dishonour, shame, stigma and being rejected by the community. Some women do not feel comfortable contacting local groups because they are often based in the communities in which they live and fear breaches of confidentiality. These women remain isolated and unsupported. The specialist faith and culturally sensitive helpline will therefore provide a safe space for women and girls to talk about their problems.

Shaista Gohir MBE, Chair of MWNUK, said: *"Muslim women and girls will be able to contact the helpline about a range of issues such as sexual violence, forced marriage, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, discrimination, mental health, self harm, marriage, divorce and polygamy. More women and girls will get the help they need, make informed decisions about their lives and be more prepared when problems escalate. The helpline will be an important step towards seeing an increase in reporting of violence."*

The 'Media, Sexism and Online Abuse' event at which the helpline is being launched forms part of the government's Women's Engagement Programme and is one of a series of regional consultation events with women across the UK ahead of the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Government is reviewing the progress it has made in this framework of commitments on women's rights, which includes women's representation in the media and its impact on gender violence.

Faeza Vaid, Executive Director of MWNUK, who will be presenting at the event said: *"The launch of the helpline is timely because objectification of women is not the only problem. The largely negative portrayal of Muslim women in the media as 'not integrated enough' is resulting in rising Islamophobia and discrimination against them and we are likely to see this reflected in the helpline calls. We are already being contacted for advice."*

The helpline is available to all and can be reached on 0800 999 5786/ 0303 999 5786. For more information see www.mwnhelpline.co.uk

Note for Editors

1. **Launch Details** – The launch will take place on Wednesday 14th January 2015 at 11am to 1pm at the Midlands Art Centre, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, B12 9QH.
2. **Contact Details of MWN Helpline:**
 - a) 0800 999 5786 (free from landlines)
 - b) 0303 999 586 (to call from mobiles)
 - c) 07415 206 936 (text us)
 - d) Website address: www.mwnhelpline.co.uk
 - e) Email: info@mwnhelpline.co.uk
3. **Operating hours** – initial opening hours will be Monday, Wednesday and Friday (10am to 1pm) and Saturday (7pm to 9pm).
4. **Media Contacts**
 - a) Shaista Gohir MBE (Chair of MWNUK) – 07802 225989
 - b) Faeza Vaid (Executive Director) – 07535 703567
5. **Muslim Women’s Network UK** (www.mwnuk.co.uk), a national Muslim women’s advocacy and campaigning organisation, which has established and will operate the helpline is a national registered charity number 1155092.
6. **Helpline Funding** - The MWN Helpline is funded by two large grant making charities, one of which is the Awards for All Big Lottery Fund.