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PRESS RELEASE: SBS and Women's Charities Urge Government to Help Women and Children Escape Abuse

by SBS Admin | Apr 11, 2020 | News, Press Release | 0 comments



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Southall Black Sisters and the Public Interest Law Centre are launching a legal challenge against the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for its failure to provide emergency funding for adequate accommodation for domestic abuse survivors during the Covid-19 crisis.

This follows a joint call to government from SBS, Compassion in Politics and over 30 charities, urging them to help women and children escape abuse, as the latest statistics suggest the rates are rising. This call was supported by hotels and hostels willing to work with us to accommodate those in need.

UPDATE: You can now support our campaign by emailing our template letters to the Home Secretary and the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government, [here](#).

Please support this campaign and endorse our letter, by leaving your signature at the [bottom of this page](#). You can also sign the 38 degrees petition to Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak [here](#).

Government must fund hotel accommodation for women escaping abuse



Women's Aid reported a 41% increase in users visiting its Live Chat between 26 March and 1 April compared to the previous week, as well as a marked increase in visitors across all its digital support services.

Women's charities are concerned that people will be trapped in abusive households unless alternative accommodation is made available to them.

In this [article](#), SBS Advocacy Services Manager, Shakila Taranum Maan, describes the challenges of providing immediate safety for women in the pandemic.

On 27 March Southall Black Sisters [1] and Compassion in Politics [2] [wrote to hotel chains](#) asking them to open up rooms to those fleeing abuse, including domestic abuse and sexual violence [3]. They report that the response from hotels – including some of the country's largest chains – has been overwhelmingly positive. However, they say that the hotels now require financial support

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from the government to underwrite the costs of opening their rooms and providing meals to occupants.

On 9 April, we wrote to key Ministers in government, asking for them to step in and provide that financial support as a matter of urgency [4]. They point to the example set by the French, Italian and Australian governments who have put in place similar measures.

The letter has been endorsed by a coalition of organisations, including Women's Aid Federation of England, Solace Woman's Aid, Women for Refugee Women and Fawcett Society. It also has the support of the London Victim Commissioner and the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime.

The letter says:

"We believe that the offer made by the hotels/hostels represents a vital opportunity for the government to work with the women's sector and with hotels to deliver a national action plan on VAWC and covid-19. As of today, hotels and specialist services are ready to support abused women and children. We are waiting for the government to play its part. The government must guarantee the immediate safety of those at risk of abuse."

The letter includes an anonymised quote from one of the hotel chains that has been consulted by the charities. The name of the chain is not disclosed to reduce the possibility that perpetrators of abuse might be able to track down a survivor's location

A domestic abuse survivor who recently contacted Southall Black Sisters said:

"I feel depressed, alone. I can't call my family to come around anymore, as I don't want to put them at risk. I'm getting more and more anxious that [my husband is] going out when he shouldn't be. I'm having to negotiate with him when I don't want to, and I don't know when he's going to retaliate."

Jess Phillips MP, Chair of the APPG on Domestic Abuse, and an active supporter of the campaign, said:

"We need the government to act now to provide the necessary funding to keep women and children safe. This is an urgent national issue that needs an urgent national response. Every passing day puts someone else at risk. Charities and the private sector have pulled together to offer solutions to deal with the rising cases of domestic abuse – now we need the government in order to deliver them."

Pragna Patel, Director at Southall Black Sisters:

"We are into the third week of lockdown and already over a dozen women and children have died at the hands of abusive partners and family members. Covid-19 is not just a medical crisis but a social, economic and human rights crisis. The hotel-hostel sector is ready and willing to help keep vulnerable women and children safe. Why is the government not ready? How many more deaths must we see before the government wakes up to this new reality?"

Jennifer Nadel, Co-Director of Compassion in Politics, said:

"The government has – rightly – mobilised huge resources in response to covid-19 but there

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deaths. We have hotels and charities lined up but the government is dragging its feet. We need action now to protect those who are trapped and in danger.”

A spokesperson from one of the nation’s largest hotel chains said:

“We recognise and support the need to help domestic abuse survivors at this critical time. We also understand the urgent need for this to happen and the emotional and physical cost of not doing so. However, we simply cannot do it without government support. We urgently need them to underwrite for us the basic financial costs involved in opening our hotels so that our staff can be un-furloughed and paid, in addition to the right support and security resources being provided to those who come to us for sanctuary.”

Fiona Dwyer, CEO of Solace Women’s Aid, said:

“We are in uncharted waters when it comes to supporting women and children living in enforced isolation and lockdown, but we know that a safe place to stay can be the difference between life and death for a woman fleeing violence and abuse. The Government must act now so no more women die as a result of abuse during this crisis, that they always have somewhere safe to go.”

For Further Information Contact:

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Notes to Editors:

[1] Southall Black Sisters is one of the UK's leading women's organisations for black and minority ethnic (BME) women. Established in 1979 we went on to set up an advice, resource, campaigning and advocacy centre with a particular focus on South Asian women. Whilst based in West London, we have a national reach. Our work by its very nature addresses issues of multiple or intersectional discrimination, involving the simultaneous experience of race, sex and other forms of discrimination. The bulk of our work is directed at assisting women and children – the overwhelming victims of domestic and other forms of gender-related violence – obtain effective protection and assert their fundamental human rights.

[2] Compassion in Politics is a cross-party organisation working to put compassion, cooperation, and inclusion at the heart of politics: www.compassioninpolitics.com.

[3] [PRESS RELEASE: SBS and Compassion in Politics, supported by MPs and women's campaigners, call on hotels to offer rooms to abused women and children.](#)

[4] Full letters here: Letter to [Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP](#). Letter to [Rt Hon Priti Patel MP](#)

Support Our Campaign

Claire Waxman, London Victim's Commissioner

Sophie Linden, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime

Nicki Norman, Acting Chief Executive, Women's Aid Federation of England

Fiona Dwyer, CEO, Solace Women's Aid

Dawn Jeffrey, Director, Welsh Women's Aid

Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director, Women's Budget Group

Maureen Connolly, CEO, Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid

Sarah Green, Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition

Baljit Banga, Executive Director, Imkaan

Umme Immam, Executive Director, The Angelou Centre

Natasha Walter, Director, Women For Refugee Women

Estelle du Boulay, Director, Rights of Women

Sam Smethers, Chief Executive, Fawcett Society

Karen Ingala Smith, Chief Executive, Nia

Dr Nicola Sharp-Jeffs, CEO, Surviving Economic Abuse

Rena Sodhi, Interim Director, London Black Women's Project

Nik Noone, CEO, Galop

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Gurpreet Virdee, Director, Women and Girls Network
Harriet Wistrich, Director, Centre for Women's Justice
Vivienne Hayes, CEO, Women's Resource Centre
Donna Covey CBE, Chief Executive, Against Violence and Abuse (AVA)
Sandhya Sharma, Group Coordinator, Safety4Sisters North West
Lorraine Masiya Mponela, Chairperson, Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group
Lisa-Marie Taylor, CEO, FILiA
Jemima Olchawski, CEO, Agenda
Christine McNaught, CEO, FWT – A Centre for Women/Coventry Women's Partnership
Diana Nammi, Executive Director, Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)
Alison Moore, CEO, Refugee Women Connect
Jo Todd, CEO, Respect
Zlakha Ahmed, CEO, Apna Haq
Shaminder Ubhi, Director, Ashiana Network
Kate Allen, CEO, Amnesty International
Councillor Dr Kindy Sandhu, Coventry City Council
Sarbjit Ganger, Director, Asian Women's Resource Centre
Vicky Marsh, Trustee, Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) Manchester
Mary Sealey
Jennifer Bates
Philip Hyde
Gill Wing, Taxpayers Against Poverty
Graham Cooper
Florah Keller-Cooper
Daniel Bluer
Angela Panks, UCU
Sam Parr, TransInsight Training & Consultancy Services
Alex Mees, Labour Party Member

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Ben Coulter

Michael Rooney

Zoe Cooper, Sedgehill School

Victoria Hancock

Barbara Mariposa, Creating Health Ltd

Melanie Williams

Tamara Etzmuss-Noble

Katharine Halls

Catrin Stewart

Jessie Wyld, Cardboard Citizens

Barbara Dwyer

Barbara Street

Anne Delaney

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