

Press release: Elected women from around the world tackle gender equality

Minister for Women and Equalities and International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt, will co-host the International Women MPs of the World conference on Thursday 8 November, which will see women parliamentarians come together to fight for women's rights.

120 women from 86 countries around the world – including Peru, Ghana and New Zealand – will sit in the House of Commons. The conference has cross-party support and is backed by former Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Harriet Harman MP, and Leader of the House, Andrea Leadsom MP.

This evening [7 November] the Prime Minister will host a reception for elected women from around the world. She will speak to them about the progress that's been made over the years in ensuring women's voices around the world are being heard. The Prime Minister will call on women from every part of public life to work together, learn from each other and build the networks that will allow them to succeed.

Globally, 800 girls and women die every day through pregnancy and childbirth complications. Girls and women who experience violence are 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV, are at increased risk of maternal mortality, and are less likely to complete their education. Violence against women and girls is estimated to cost economies between 1.2% and 3.7% of GDP.

When girls receive an extra year of primary schooling they can increase their wages by 10-20% when they get a job, most of which is likely to be reinvested in her family and community. When women are meaningfully involved in conflict resolution, peace accords are 35% more likely to last for 15 years or more.

Currently there are the highest number of women in history sitting in the House of Commons, but still only 32% of UK MPs are women, and worldwide just 24% of people elected into international Parliaments are women. One hundred years ago women were not only denied seats in the Chamber, they were also denied seats in the public gallery, in case they distracted the men from the serious business of politics.

In her opening speech, Ms Mordaunt will also set out some of the obstacles female parliamentarians working to provide support, empowerment and services for women are facing, as well as the heroism in overcoming those obstacles.

Minister for Women and Equalities Penny Mordaunt said:

Every woman and girl deserves the right to a safe childhood, to a quality education, to reproductive healthcare and to a life without fear.

But the shocking reality is that for many girls and women across the world this is not the case – women’s rights have dropped off the global agenda.

The women attending today’s historic sitting in our House of Commons have all overcome challenges in their own countries to become MPs and have their voices heard. Together we will commit to redoubling our fight for women’s rights and pledge that we won’t be deterred by political barriers.

Our message is simple – women’s rights are human rights.

Getting more women into politics gives a voice to women and girls around the world to enable them to fight for their rights, creates female role models and leads to legislation and work which tackles gender inequalities and discrimination.

The conference will also include discussion on the support elected women need to deal with harassment and abuse, balance family and political responsibilities, and help more women to be active in politics.

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Speech: PM speech at reception for Women MPs of the World conference: 7 November 2018

Good evening everyone, and a very warm welcome to Downing Street for what is a very special event.

The women here tonight come from many nations, many cultures and many backgrounds. We have lived very different lives, we hold different political beliefs, but each of us have answered the unique calling that is public service. And we all have the privilege of serving our communities and our countries in our national legislatures.

Here in the UK, women have been allowed to do that for just 100 years – later this month will see the centenary of the law being changed to allow women to stand for Parliament. A year from now we will also mark the 100th anniversary of Nancy Astor becoming the first woman to take her seat in the House of Commons.

Celebrating is something we should be doing this evening. Because today, 2018, we see more female members of parliaments and legislative assemblies around the world than there have ever been.

And that is good news for all of the citizens we serve.

More women in elected office means a greater voice speaking out on issues that affect women, certainly. It also means a greater focus on preventing gender-based violence, on girls' education, on childcare and on women's health.

One of my proudest achievements as Home Secretary was passing the Modern Slavery Act, which makes a real difference in the fight to protect women and girls.

And as Minister for Women and Equalities I was delighted to change the law on parental leave so that both parents are able to take on caring responsibilities for their child – something I'd long campaigned for in opposition.

But the benefits of a more equal parliament are also felt more widely. After all, if half the population is systematically excluded from politics then you're excluding half the talent.

A parliament where women are a rare sight is a parliament working with one hand tied behind its back; a more representative parliament leads to better decision making, better politics and ultimately better government.

So we should absolutely celebrate the progress that has been made, and the number of women who now have a place in their nation's parliament. And we

should remember that it has not come about by accident. It is the result of many years of effort by people around the world.

That includes one of the women who has been instrumental in helping to deliver tomorrow's conference, Harriet Harman MP.

Harriet has been an MP for 36 years – she won't mind me saying. She has spent much of that time battling to make Parliament a better, more accessible workplace for women. And although we certainly have our differences, Harriet, I want to thank you for all you have done –and continue to do – to support the cause of women in politics.

In 2010 I took over from Harriet as Minister for Women and Equalities. And I want to thank the present Minister, Penny Mordaunt, for everything she has done in making tomorrow's conference possible – and for everything she is doing, as Secretary of State for International Development, promoting women's participation in politics at home and around the world.

While we celebrate how far we have come, we should not lose sight of the fact that there is still a long way to go. Women make up half the world's population but barely a quarter of its nationally elected representatives.

If we want to see that improve in our lifetimes, then it's not enough to simply stand by and wait for change to happen. We have to make it happen. And I'm absolutely committed to doing just that.

Back in 2005, here in the UK, I co-founded an organisation called Women2Win, aimed at giving more women the tools and networks they need to be selected as candidates in my party.

It's not about positive discrimination, but creating a level playing field – and it's making a real difference.

When I first entered the Commons I was one of only 13 female MPs in my party. Today there are 67 of us, and I'm immensely proud at how many have benefited from the support of Women2Win's.

As a government, we are funding nationwide programmes aimed at getting more women and girls interested in politics here in the UK.

And worldwide our Department for International Development is working to empower women in political life.

In Sierra Leone we've worked with groups including the Westminster Foundation for Democracy to run a voter education campaign for women.

In Nigeria, the Women in Politics programme has helped establish a Women's Caucus in Abuja's National Assembly.

And in Pakistan, a UK-funded voter registration drive signed up more than 400,000 women ahead of this year's general election.

By doing so we're helping to give women in the UK and around the world a

greater voice – and we're not alone in such efforts. From Ireland's Inspire to India's Girls Parliament, people and programmes are working to get more women and girls interested in politics, asking them to stand, and supporting them to win.

Getting elected is only half the battle. We also have to make the system work once we are a part of it – and doing so in what is often a male-dominated and male-oriented environment is not always easy.

So I hope that tomorrow's conference, by giving you the opportunity to share ideas and insights, will enable you to learn from one another. Because, together, we can overcome challenges, and can get on with what we got into this business to do: contributing to society, responding to the needs of local constituents and making a real difference to people's lives.

It's the ability to do that – to make a difference – that makes being an member of parliament the best job in the world. It's a privilege we all enjoy, and one I'd like many more women and girls around the world to aspire to.

In the words of the great British suffragist Millicent Fawcett, whose statue took its rightful place in Parliament Square this year, she said, "courage calls to courage everywhere". So regardless of affiliation or ideology, let's all work together, let's learn from each other, let's build the networks that will allow us to succeed.

And let's make sure women and girls know that whatever their views, whatever their party, whatever others may say, a woman's place is in elected office.

[News story: Post Office and MOD agree new partnership on veterans employment](#)

The Ministry of Defence and the Post Office have agreed a new partnership to support veterans entering employment, as the company became the 3000th organisation to sign the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation to those who serve or who have served, and their families, that they should be treated fairly and are not disadvantaged in their day-to-day lives. As part of their pledge, the Post Office will encourage ex-service personnel to apply for vacancies, offer bespoke training and support reservists and cadet volunteers with their commitments.

The signing took place at a Service of Remembrance to mark the centenary of the end of the First World War, attended by Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson and Group CEO of the Post Office, Paula Vennells.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The Post Office has a long and distinguished history with the Armed Forces and it is fitting they are the 3000th signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Those who have served our country so courageously deserve the full support of organisations and businesses across the public and private sector.

Today, the Post Office has demonstrated the value that reservist and ex-service personnel can bring to businesses.

From today, the Post Office will work with the MOD's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to facilitate employment for former service personnel by advertising their vacancies on the CTP's website. They will also offer a specialist training programme, commit to hiring a certain number of veterans, and offer paid leave for reservists and time off for any deployment commitments.

Alongside this, they will support the Cadet Force by granting adult volunteers five days paid leave for their annual camp and establish a new Post Office Armed Forces Network for those with links to the military.

Paula Vennells, Group CEO of Post Office, said:

It's a real honour to sign the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of the Post Office at this very special service, recognising the value that our serving personnel, both Regular and Reservists, veterans and military families contribute in the present to our business and our country.

We know that having a diverse workforce brings huge benefits to a business; and our ex-Armed Forces colleagues and those in the Reserves are a unique and vital asset to the Post Office. We want to thank them for their service and to ensure that we continue to create a business in which everyone can thrive and develop as part of the Post Office team.

The signing took place at St Botolph's-Without-Aldersgate Church in central London – a poignant location as inside the Church is a dedicated memorial and battle flag of the Post Office Rifles, the General Post Office's own battalion, who served with distinction, earning high praise and a prestigious place in British military history. More than 75,000 General Post Office employees left their roles to fight in the War, with 12,000 joining the Post Office Rifles.

The Armed Forces Covenant was established in 2011, is a whole of government responsibility, and includes signatories from across organisations,

businesses and charities. Support is provided in a number of areas, including education, starting a new career and access to healthcare.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood added:

Our Armed Forces are one of the most professional forces in the world. Our people are brave, disciplined and natural leaders.

Organisations such as the Post Office can thrive by taking advantage of these transferable skills. I encourage more businesses to sign up.

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