

Prime Minister: International Women's Day Speech

For more than 100 years, International Women's Day has called on us to stand together and celebrate the tremendous achievements of women in every country around the world.

This year, it is particularly significant for us here in the UK because it coincides with a very significant centenary, the moment when some women were given the right to vote here in the UK.

Today, it may seem extraordinary to us that women in this country were not only denied the right to vote until that time, but had to fight so hard for it.

And yet despite the huge political, social and economic strides that we've taken forward since, we know there are areas where things are simply not right.

Over the past year we have seen something of a watershed moment.

I am of course referring to the women who have broken the silence on pervasive sexual harassment with the powerful "Me Too" movement;

Spoken out about instances where – incredibly – a pay difference still exists between themselves and men carrying out the same work.

And called out the bullying and harassment some – particularly those in public life – face online.

Much work remains to be done in all those areas, but today I want to turn to another issue.

Because today everybody gathered in this room is here because we are all united in one single aim: bringing an end to abhorrent and life-shattering domestic abuse.

Across the country thousands of women endure unimaginable abuse in their homes, there are women who know what that means on a daily basis, often at the hands of those they are closest to, every single day.

I believe we need nothing short of a complete change across the whole of society in the way we think about and tackle domestic abuse. That's why today we are launching a consultation on our proposals for new laws, stronger powers and new prevention measures.

And the trouble is too often women and men – although mainly women – suffer in silence and endure the most terrifying behaviour.

We've tended to always think of it in terms of violence, but sometimes it

means other forms of abuse that may not involve physical harm but certainly should be criminal. And so for the first time the Bill will provide a statutory definition of domestic abuse that includes non-physical abuse such as economic abuse. And we won't let anyone trivialise these forms of abuse.

The Bill will recognise the devastating impact domestic abuse has on families, by creating a statutory aggravating factor which will allow for tougher sentences in cases involving children. For too long, the approach was taken that children are not affected. It is time we recognise that they are.

It will create new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders, drawing on the strongest powers from existing orders to allow police and courts to intervene earlier.

It will establish a Domestic Abuse Commissioner, to hold public bodies to account, and act as a national champion for victims.

And we will build upon the work I started at the Home Office – putting Clare's Law – the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme which allows anyone to ask if their partner has a violent history – onto a statutory basis; giving victims of domestic abuse the same range of protections in courts as those who have suffered from modern slavery or sexual offences; and further strengthening the ground-breaking offence of controlling and coercive behaviour in a family relationship, which we introduced in 2015.

I am grateful for the work that so many of you do with the police, and those in the criminal justice system and other public services, to ensure that victims are given the support that they need, when they need it. I know that, for too many years, too many people in power did not take this issue seriously. That is why, as Home Secretary, I commissioned Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary to inspect every police force on their response to domestic abuse, ensuring that each force took action wherever the law enforcement response fell short of what it needed to be.

I also understand just how important it is for those fleeing violent partners to have a safe place to go, and our recent injection of £20 million for accommodation-based services is already providing 2,200 additional beds in refuges and safe accommodation benefiting 19,000 victims.

But I know there are concerns about our proposals on how supported housing will be funded in the future. So I want to make clear that I am committed to delivering a sustainable funding model for refuges and to ensuring that there is no postcode lottery when it comes to provision across the country. That is why I want to work with all the charities and organisations working on the front line to get your ideas on how we can get this right.

And we want your input. Those working with those affected and those who have gone through it. You know what will work and what will not.

This morning I visited Safe Lives and heard first-hand the harrowing accounts of women who have suffered at the hands of abusers.

And I would like to pay tribute to all those survivors here today and beyond who show such bravery in speaking out, and to all of you working so hard to

support victims and raise awareness. Thank you. You do an incredible job, often in very difficult circumstances.

This is an issue that unites us all – whatever your background or political party. I am grateful to MPs and Peers of all parties for their tireless campaigning on behalf of survivors, and hope that we can work together to build a real consensus around these proposals.

We need to get this legislation right. We need to hear from the widest range of voices possible: experts, charities, frontline professionals, and as many people affected by abuse, from as many walks of life, as possible. So I urge all of you here today to encourage others to contribute with this consultation.

Every year many lives are ruined. Children witness appalling scenes and suffer lasting trauma and emotional damage.

No woman and no child should ever spend their days living in fear, suffering domestic abuse and fearful of speaking out.

A century ago, women fought for their independence, for their right to be heard. Today, we have come a long way but the fact we are gathered here today to talk about the continued issue of domestic abuse shows we still have a long way to go.

We also have a great challenge. So, a hundred years on, let's fight with the same vigour, the same determination. And let's be the ones to consign domestic abuse to the past.