

The ratification of the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention

Director General, no-one should be the target of violence and harassment, especially for simply doing their job.

I am pleased to be here today to mark the UK's ratification of the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, the first international treaty to recognise the right to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including based on gender.

The UK played a leading role during the two years of negotiations on the content of the Convention and will become the 11th country to ratify and register it.

It will build on our commitment to, and track record on, tackling all forms of violence and harassment, including gender-based violence.

This Convention is an opportunity to shape a future of work based on dignity and respect for all.

I am proud to sign it on behalf of the United Kingdom and look forward to seeing and encouraging more states to ratify this convention in the coming months.

It is all the more poignant today, on the eve of International Women's Day.

The UK has a strong legal framework to prevent and address violence and harassment in the workplace, including civil, criminal and health and safety laws.

To strengthen those protections, we will introduce a new duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as explicit protections against workplace harassment by third parties, for example customers or clients.

This follows our response to a consultation on sexual harassment, which we published in July 2021.

We are also supporting the Equality and Human Rights Commission to develop a statutory Code of Practice on workplace harassment, as well as preparing our own practical guidance for employers on preventing sexual harassment in the workplace.

These commitments to reinforce the law will help make workplaces safer.

But we know we have more to do to drive out abuse and violence wherever it happens across society, whether on the street, in the home or perpetrated by those in positions of authority who should be a source of safety, not danger.

In response to the recent high-profile cases of violent crimes against women in the UK, it is important we are open about the lessons that need to be learnt and we are working hard across government on new measures to improve public safety, particularly for women.

Alongside our determination at home and focus on delivering the commitments in this Convention, the UK has a strong record in leading the world in protecting and promoting the safety and rights of women and girls wherever they live and whatever background they are from, I know the UK is determined to build on the pioneering work they have done during the last decade.

At the heart of this Convention is people's right to be safe – and feel safe – in their place of work.

That has been brought into sharp and extreme focus by the invasion of Ukraine. In the face of unimaginable threats and violence, many people have been bravely getting on with their jobs to continue vital support and services – including doctors and nurses working in hospitals to save lives or those who were working at Europe's largest nuclear power plant at the time it was shelled and set on fire.

Moments of conflict and tragedy bring home the many consequences of violence and strengthen our resolve to create a safer world for everyone to live and work.

It is in that spirit that I am proud to deposit the UK's Instrument of Ratification here at the ILO and to sign the Certificate of Deposit for a Convention that will deliver a more inclusive, integrated and international approach to tackling workplace violence and harassment.