

Reflecting on International Women's Day 2024

Although we have made great strides towards gender equality in the UK, women are too often an afterthought when it comes to economic empowerment.

Time and again, the extra barriers women face in the workplace are ignored while we are left without the support we deserve.

Just look at how menopause is treated. Fawcett Society research has shown that 1 in 10 women leave a job because of symptoms of the menopause. Yet still, the Conservative Government refuses to pilot a trial on menopause leave. And they have missed an opportunity to make a splash with their Women's Health Strategy, where their work to support women in the workplace has frustratingly gone silent.

Not to mention the extra costs women shoulder simply because of the fact we are women.

From the pink tax, to the 'motherhood penalty' and gender pay gap, there is a laundry list of extra economic disadvantages that women face.

Heartbreakingly, the financial barriers become worse for survivors of domestic violence, many of whom have to make the impossible choice between remaining in an unsafe home or facing destitution.

These failings hurt everyone – women, our society, and our economy. Despite this, the Chancellor didn't mention women a single time in his Budget this week.

Women deserve an ambitious vision from political parties. I'm proud that Liberal Democrats have a credible plan to smash through these economic barriers disproportionately facing women.

We brought forward new policies to end period poverty across the UK just this year, responding to the cost of living crisis which meant that a further 1 million women couldn't afford the period products they need.

My colleague Munira Wilson MP, has spearheaded a revolutionary new parental leave and childcare policy – helping more mothers return to the workplace should they want to, and fighting against the gender pay gap.

These new policies are only the beginning. As Liberal Democrats, we will keep doing everything we can to fight for gender equality. Our country cannot afford to avoid investing in women any longer.

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Author:

My visit to Israel and Palestine

We've all been appalled by the shocking and tragic events in the Middle East over the past few months.

There is a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, and it is only growing. Thousands of innocent Palestinians have been killed and around 1.5 million have been displaced to Rafah where they are fearing for their lives, as the prospect of an IDF offensive looms.

The appalling hostage situation continues – with more than 100 people still held by Hamas following the utterly deplorable terrorist attacks carried out by the group on 7 October.

Liberal Democrats have been calling for an immediate bilateral ceasefire for months – to put an end to the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza, get the hostages home, and finally deliver a path to the two state solution.

The impact of this conflict has been felt deeply not just across the region, but in the UK too, in particular the Jewish, Palestinian and Muslim communities.

Since 7 October, I, [Layla Moran](#) and [Christine Jardine](#) have met with many impacted groups – such as those working to combat soaring antisemitism and Islamophobia, NGOs working in Gaza, and families whose loved ones are being held hostage by Hamas.

But as the devastation from the conflict only continues to mount, I felt that it was necessary to visit the region myself – to meet people in Israel and Palestine whose lives have been turned upside down by the conflict, and speak to politicians and civil society about how to secure two states and a lasting peace.

I have just returned from my visit to Israel and Palestine. Here's what I saw, heard and learnt on the trip:



I saw the bullet hole-ridden, blown-out houses of the Kfar Aza kibbutz, one of the many places attacked by Hamas on 7 October, and a place where many peace activists had lived.

I also travelled to the site of the music festival at Re'im where over 300 people were tragically murdered, and where many are now paying their respects to friends and relatives.



At the Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem, I met six-month old triplets whose mother is stuck in Gaza and cannot get a permit to travel to Jerusalem to be with her children.

I spoke with hospital administrators who told me that the hospital is struggling financially after Israel withheld funding from the Palestinian Authority last year.



Itzik Horn's sons Eitan and Yair were taken hostage by Hamas on 7 October.

He described to me the anguish he is living with, not being able to know exactly where his sons are and in what condition they're in.

Meeting with Palestinian NGOs working on the ground in Gaza, they explained how what was already a humanitarian crisis in the Strip before October has now become catastrophic. They also spoke about how the West Bank now faces an unprecedented situation, with settler violence spiking.

At the Knesset – the Israeli Parliament – I held a constructive meeting with Yair Lapid, leader of our liberal sister party in Israel as well as Leader of the Opposition to Netanyahu's government, and discussed the importance of removing Netanyahu from power – both for Israelis and Palestinians.



Visiting Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial, I laid a wreath on behalf of our party in memory of the millions of Jews murdered during the Holocaust.



I learned about the impact of illegal settlement expansion on Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, which is making two-states ever harder to achieve.



The United Nations Humanitarian Agency, UNOCHA, explained to me their assessment of the dire crisis facing Palestinians if the IDF commences an offensive in Rafah.

It's very clear that both Israelis and Palestinians are suffering deep and ongoing trauma from the 7 October attacks and the humanitarian situation in Gaza. In an environment of such grief and loss, it would be easy to write off the prospects of a future peace. But my belief that we cannot go back to the way things were before – that a two-state solution is the only way to ensure nothing like this happens again – has only been strengthened.

It's also apparent that the illegal Israeli settler movement is having a very negative impact on the ground in the West Bank, actively working to prevent a future two state solution. Settler violence against Palestinians has spiked since October 7 and is having a destabilising effect right now in the West Bank – which is a tinderbox. The settlements are a breach of international law.

Since my return, I have called for the far-right Israeli ministers and extremist leaders of the illegal settlement movement, [Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, to be sanctioned by the UK.](#)



Our Foreign Affairs spokespersons Layla Moran and Lord Purvis also both recently visited the region. You can learn more about their visit [here](#) and [here](#).

Liberal Democrats will continue to stand up for international law and for a lasting peace. It is the only way to secure the dignity and security that Israelis and Palestinians deserve, ensuring that the events we have seen these past few months never happen again.

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Author:

[It's time to ban conversion therapy for good](#)

Tomorrow, my bill to ban conversion therapy will be debated in the House of Lords.

It's too easy to think of these practices as a remnant from the past. Sadly, this is far from the reality. The Government's own research has shown that 7% of LGBT+ people had undergone or been offered conversion therapy.

This is an appalling statistic. Sexual orientation or gender identity is not a problem to be treated and 'cured'. It's who we are – and these practices have got to stop.

But time and again, the Conservative Government has broken their promise to deliver a conversion therapy ban. Five years on, we cannot afford to waste any more time.

We cannot leave the LGBT+ community unprotected against these harms for any longer.

That's why I have tabled a bill which will make it an offence for any person to practise, or offer to practise, conversion therapy.

My bill seeks to be as comprehensive as possible, to make sure that all LGBT+ people are protected and no loopholes can persist. And it will focus on the intended purpose of the practice – ensuring that genuine psychological or religious support without a predetermined goal isn't caught up in a ban.

Of course, this isn't the first time us Liberal Democrats have been at the forefront of the fight for LGBT+ equality.

From Ed Davey moving the clause to repeal Section 28, to Lynne Featherstone's tireless work in getting the Same Sex Marriage Act passed, we have a long, proud history of delivering change for the LGBT+ community.

It is my sincere hope that we can do the same with this bill.

There is still a long road ahead. The only way to get this bill passed is with support from the Government. So we will be pushing Conservative ministers to do the right thing and back our bill.

In the past weeks, I have been amazed to see a positive response from so many of my colleagues in the House of Lords. I have been busy meeting with parliamentarians from all parties and none to discuss how we can work together to deliver a ban.

It's clear that there is cross-party consensus. So we will keep working together on this.

Because it isn't about party politics. **It's about finally delivering the change the LGBT+ community deserves.** And I will keep doing everything in my power to make this a reality.

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Author:

Munira Wilson introduces Schools' Mental Health Bill to Parliament

Childhood is supposed to be a happy time, filled with cherished memories and laughter. However, for too many it can also be a very difficult time. Headteachers say that there are numerous pressing challenges facing our education system and many come from outside of the classroom. Mental health is among the biggest.

According to recent data, it is estimated that one in five children between the ages of 7 to 16 have a probable mental health disorder. Early intervention is crucial. Research tells us that half of all lifetime mental health disorders start before the age of 14. Stepping in as soon as warning signs start to show can often help to prevent conditions from becoming more severe.

Our Bill would place a dedicated qualified mental health practitioner in every school – primary and secondary – giving every child in school access to care and support from the moment they start needing it.

“This Bill is an investment in our future, and it is an investment we must make. Because we owe it to this generation of young people.” [@Munirawilson](#) introduces her bill to Parliament, which would place a qualified mental health professional in every school. pic.twitter.com/rVJTLtGegd

– Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) [January 9, 2024](#)

Currently help that is available is stretched thinly across many local primary and secondary schools, which means their valuable skills and service is only available about half a day per week in many schools. Children who are waiting for mental health support miss substantial amounts of schooling and this absence has a huge impact on their life chances. We cannot wait to tackle this issue.

Our Bill makes clear funding needs to be made available for this proposed statutory duty for all state schools. Using the “polluter pays” principle, Liberal Democrats have proposed funding these mental health practitioners through tripling the digital services tax on our big social media companies, given the harm they have contributed to our children’s mental health.

There is a tidal wave of mental ill health among our children and young people. It is jeopardising their current wellbeing, their education, their prospects, and their long-term health. Professionals from the education sector, mental health sector, and other public services all agree that something more has to be done. Putting a mental health practitioner in every school is an important step in tackling this vital issue.

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Author:

[Ed Davey's Tory Removal Service](#)

The Liberal Democrats are the leading Conservative MP removal service in the Blue Wall and beyond. Four historic by-election wins and sweeping gains in last May's local elections show that voters across the country are turning to us for change.

People are fed up with waiting for promised hospitals that are never built, waiting for an end to sewage being dumped in our rivers and waiting for real action on the cost of living.

To kickstart his Surrey campaign tour, Ed Davey drove a poster van advertising 'Ed Davey's Tory Removals' through Guildford, before addressing Lib Dem campaigners, activists and the party's local parliamentary candidate Zöe Franklin. The poster describes the Liberal Democrats as the "Blue Wall's Premium Conservative MP unseating service", with services including repairing NHS waiting times, ending raw sewage discharges and tackling the cost of living crisis.



It shouldn't be up to Rishi Sunak to cling on for another twelve months, desperately hoping for something to turn up and causing even more damage as he tries to keep his fractured party behind him.

That's why we're tabling a law to force a General Election, so we can send the movers into Number 10 and get rid of this out-of-touch Conservative

Government.

General Election NOW

Join our calls for an immediate General Election.

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Would you like to receive email updates? (required)

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Would you like to receive phone communication? (optional)

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Author: