



Home Office

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Dear Colleague,

**Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)**

Tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a key priority for both me, as Minister for Vulnerability, Safeguarding and Countering Extremism, and for this Government. No woman should live in fear of violence, and every girl should grow up knowing she is safe, so that she can have the best start in life. Last March we published an ambitious cross-Government VAWG strategy through which will drive a real transformation of service provision, providing support to local commissioners so all areas rise to the level of the best and all victims get the right support at the right time.

Since 2010 we have made considerable progress in tackling VAWG. We have strengthened the law and provided agencies with the tools they need to support victims, bring perpetrators to justice, and prevent these crimes happening in the first place. We have introduced new offences of coercive and controlling behaviour, stalking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM); and have banned 'revenge porn'. And prosecutions and convictions for VAWG have risen to their highest ever levels.

Your may be aware of Dr Eilidh Whiteford MP's Private Member's Bill, *Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Ratification of Convention) Bill* which is due to have its Report stage on Friday (24 February).

The Istanbul Convention is a Council of Europe Convention which aims to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, to protect victims and to end the impunity of perpetrators. The UK signed the Convention on 8 June 2012 to demonstrate our commitment to ending all forms of VAWG, and this Government has made clear that we remain fully committed to ratifying it. That is why, as the Prime Minister set out at Prime Minister's Questions on Wednesday, we are supporting Dr Whiteford's Private Member's Bill.

We recognise the scope and ambition of the Istanbul Convention will secure more joined up international policies on our goals and commitments. By further removing legislative barriers and ensuring recognised shared standards are in place, we can continue to improve our delivery framework and quality of provision, for a more robust and effective response service for victims of violence. That is why I hope you will join the Government in supporting this Bill on Friday.

Over the next four years, we will continue to drive a transformation in service delivery and we have pledged increased funding of £80 million of funding to support this. We are developing the evidence base on what works to tackle the causes of offending behaviour to achieve sustainable reductions in violence and abuse.

But we know there is more to do. The Prime Minister recently announced a major new programme of work leading towards bringing forward a Domestic Violence and Abuse Act. This will be coordinated by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice and will look at what more can be done to improve support for victims especially in the way the law, and legal procedures, currently work for such victims.

Tackling Violence Against Women is a key priority for this Government and I hope that you will join us in our efforts to ensure that all women have the best possible start in life.



**Sarah Newton MP**  
**Minister for Vulnerability, Safeguarding and Countering Extremism**