



United House  
North Road  
London  
N7 9DP

t 020 7697 3450  
f 020 7697 3479  
e info@wrc.org.uk  
w www.wrc.org.uk

Registered charity  
1070606.  
Company limited by  
guarantee 2462336.



The National Alliance of Women's Organisations  
United House, North Road, London, London N7 9DP  
020 7697 3468; admin@nawo.org.uk; www.nawo.org.uk

## **CEDAW Roundtable 26<sup>th</sup> June 2017 – additional comments**

### **Article 5 – Sex Role Stereotyping and Prejudice**

- To be included in school curricula: disabled women and stigmas;
- Recognise and uphold disabled women's reproductive and maternal rights, e.g. ensure that their children are not taken away as a result of prejudice of disability;
- The role played by faith schools where there is a complete segregation such as in Islamic schools - segregation and religious teaching enforce masculine superiority and prepares the mind for gender inequality.

### **Article 6 - Exploitation**

- According to [Article 6](#) of CEDAW: "*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women*", thus ending demand, decriminalisation of sellers, provision of educational and social support for women exiting, as well as criminalisation of the purchase of sex should be made explicit in the text as a desirable form of legislation to support gender equality and a society that does not accept that women's bodies (nor those of men) may be bought and used to satisfy the sexual desires of the buyer but not the seller. Northern Ireland has already passed such laws;
- The government must take a clear position and have vision and aspiration for the future of prostitution, supporting women involved, helping women exit and developing effective prevention. The model we support challenges demand, decriminalises women (including wiping/sealing criminal records for prostitution) but criminalises pimps and buyers and invests in exiting support;
- Women's reporting not taken seriously by the police as illustrated by the example of [Helen Pearson who reported a stalker to police 125 times before being stabbed by him](#);
- Need training for border security and other agencies about young women being taken out of the country for forced marriage;
- Soroptimist International are working with Police Scotland on a campaign to deal with cybersex trafficking including prevention of live-streamed sexual abuse of



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children (see more information [here](#)) but more awareness raising is needed when it comes to these issues.

### Article 7 - Women's representation in political and public life

- Disabled women need disability-related costs support to engage in the political process.

### Article 9 - Nationality

- Children should be entitled to settle in the UK; the problems of separating children from parents even after living here since birth is a serious issue which needs to be addressed;
- The imposition of citizenship exams that are publicly acknowledged to be difficult and contain questions which most 'natives' would not be able to answer as well as the high costs of obtaining passports have serious implications especially for women and their children. The situation has worsened due to Brexit;
- A wide range of women are affected by "no recourse to public funds" (NRPF). While the Domestic Violence (DDV) concession has been a positive step forward, it only covers a tiny proportion of all women affected.

### Article 10 – Education

- Harassment and bullying/cyber bullying of girls in schools continues to be an obstacle to their education, oftentimes taking place on social media and online spaces.

### Article 11: Employment

- Access to work support for disabled women that includes support workers, extra transport costs, accessible workplaces and assistive technology.

### Article 12 – Women's Health



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- Disabled women do not have proper access to reproductive health care due to lack of health professionals' knowledge and proper accessible hospital equipment for smear tests etc.

### Article 13 – Economic and Social Benefits

- Disabled women limited by cuts in care and mobility /independent living by changes to the Personal Independence Payments (PIP);
- Women in prisons: more resources are needed in prison services; high number of women inmates have mental health issues as well as learning disabled;
- From 6 April 2017 support through Child Tax Credit, Universal Credit or Income Support is normally limited to the first two children in the family (see more [here](#)). The introduction of this cap increases child poverty. We support the anti-poverty organisations that have called upon government to rethink this policy. We oppose any social security system that restricts women's choices around their reproductive rights.

Out of nearly 19 million families in the UK in 2016, nearly three million were lone parent families – 92% of whom were headed by women . These women are likely to be already living in poverty, and this will increase it.

Further children in the family will not be eligible for benefits apart from a narrow set of exemptions – for example, if the additional child was born as a result of rape or within a relationship of coercive control. The government has chosen to use a third-party model approach to verify that claimants qualify for this exemption. 'Approved third parties' include specialist support workers from organisations including Rape Crisis and others.

The exemption clauses put front line Rape Crisis services in a very difficult position, as in order to support women to claim benefits they must co-operate with a system that denies benefits to women who have not been raped, and to children who have not been born of rape.

### Articles 15/16 – Equality before the law and civil matters/ Equality in marriage and family



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## law

- Sharia Law as a parallel and privatised legal system it increases vulnerability of BME women;
- Disabled women not afforded equality in law on domestic violence - the Serious Crime Act 2015 section 76 made controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship an offence but simultaneously introduced a defence if the perpetrator believed he was acting in the victim's "best interests".

## General recommendation No. 18: Disabled women

- There is a lot of evidence emerging about discrimination and harassment of women and girls with disabilities. Those affected need to be listened to. There is also an urgent need for training programmes.

## General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against women:

- Government has supported a gender neutral approach to VAWG and promoted work with men and boys (as victims of domestic and/or sexual violence) and for BME women this is being framed within faith based responses. This is deeply troubling as it can and does place women in greater danger and at risk of further control;
- For Muslim women sex outside of marriage is seen as adultery and is labelled prostitution; and a woman could be killed in honour killing for that;
- Non-state violence - is torture inflicted on women and girls in the private sphere within the UK.

Women and girls suffer torture through being trafficked, exploited, being prostituted, gang raped, through organised crime including child crime scene photos and videos, as well as in the home by family and other private actors.

Services for women and girls need to recognise torture as a specific form of violence particularly against women and girls on the continuum of violence that they suffer so that women and girls can receive specific support that fits the crimes of the torture endured.

Appendix 34 Non-State Torture (available [here](#)) was included in the WRC Report for CEDAW in 2013;

- Serious state failings in terms of responding to, preventing, investigating, prosecuting and achieving convictions regarding Domestic and Sexual Violence. Examples include but are not limited to (i) the failures pointed out by the [HMIC inspections](#), (ii) [Worboys case](#), (iii) lack of official data collection regarding fatal male violence against women (the extend of which is captured in the [Femicide Census Report](#)). Inappropriate measures – anger management, couples counselling, restorative justice, mediation, inappropriate perpetrator programmes, out of court disposal, caution – all seek to save money and reduce amount of cases and time going through official justice routes and to reduce crime figures as these are repeat and volume crimes – but consequently undermine access to justice, build impunity for perpetrators and reduce the severity with which state addresses VAWG.

General Recommendation No. 27: Older women:

- *“The Committee urges the State party to mitigate the impact of austerity measures on women and services provided to women, particularly women with disabilities and older women. It should also ensure that Spending Reviews continuously focus on measuring and balancing the impact of austerity measures on women’s rights. It should further review the policy of commissioning services wherever this may undermine the provision of specialised women’s services” (Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland July 2013)*

As the above mentions austerity and its impact on older women we need to stress several issues:

- Isolation of older women in rural areas due to bus service axing/severe reductions;
- Access to affordable, accessible, appropriate care in the home or in care setting. Huge cuts in domiciliary care due to LA cuts;
- Older women’s access to and maintenance in the labour market to (i) sustain pension rights, (ii) augment pension income when latter inadequate, and



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combat poverty in old age.

- Need to recognise the specific requirements of older women experiencing intimate partner violence and abuse (Article 16, General Recommendation 19 - VAWG). For more information see Appendix 1 and 2.

#### Additional comments:

- Commissioning remains a race to the bottom for lowest unit cost, generic, economies of scale funding irrespective of quality, specialism, gender or women's actual needs;
- We also have serious concerns about the way that the statutory sector is attempting to co-opt NGOs into a supply chain as a sub-contractor which imperils women's trust in our services, breaches confidentiality, undermines the whole point and principle and ethos of NGOs, deters women from accessing services – goes against the compact between government and NGOs which is meant to safeguard our independence of voice purpose and action. The reports published by The Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector chart the intimidation, threats, silencing (gagging clauses, no advocacy clauses etc.) and killing off of the NGO sector and of our independence which are vital to the effective functioning of the voluntary sector and to women accessing services;
- One of major concerns is that in the UK at the moment any discussion about BME becomes a discussion about faith. Racism is subsumed into responses to anti-Muslim hatred and the needs of non-Muslim women or Muslim women who do not use faith as their primary identity is lost. Faith is an important aspect of the lives of many women but we also need to ensure that those of no faith are also protected. Atheists and secular activists (secular is not anti-faith) from BME communities are silenced, threatened and marginalised for speaking up about human rights and gender equality.

Government responses to BME and/or community issues are led by those groups representing a faith identity at the exclusion of others. Many have written about this and tried to raise our concerns at the lack of any community wide work including women's secular, anti-racist organisations that are not faith based. This is impacting upon all aspects of work with BME women – many of whom are expressing their own concerns about this (examples include work done by [Southall Black Sisters](#) and open



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letter to government from Amina Lone (Appendix 3));

- Sharia courts inquiry - not transparent and insufficient inclusion of women's organisations: e.g. it did not include British organisations of Arab origin. Regulating Sharia courts will give them credibility which they do not have in the religion;
- We need to ensure the retention of all rights afforded to women and girls under EU laws and conventions including reproductive health and rights such as abortion afforded to GB but not to Northern Ireland;
- International oversight, if not afforded through the EU, makes the UN and its conventions and reporting mechanisms even more important for monitoring women's and girl's human rights.