

UPF UK Event in the Lords: Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls

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Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls - Universal Peace Federation - UK Event in the House of Lords:

Baroness Sandip Verma, host for the Universal Peace Federation UK's (UPF) commemoration of The United Nations Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls in the House of Lords Committee Room, emphasised that we must utilise Parliament to enact the necessary changes. Verma, a former spokesperson on women's equality issues for the House of Lords, had hosted a number of UPF events in the Palace of Westminster over the past decade in order to encourage and facilitate the cooperation of activists, NGO's and Parliamentarians to end this gender discrimination.

Marie Hanson MBE, a survivor of domestic abuse herself, is the CEO of STORM Family Centre, and a great supporter of victims of domestic violence. UPF UK Director, Margaret Ali, explained STORM's significance and activities. Hanson stated that Domestic Violence is a major part of her work. She explained that her ex-husband was abusing their daughter as well. She said his sentence was not enough. She feels strongly that the law has to change particularly when abuse of children is involved.

Melissa Morbeck, the Global Director of Partnerships at the NOMORE Foundation as well as the Executive Director of the Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence, spoke both of NoMore's work as well as her own experience. She explained that NoMore is dedicated to ending Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Its practice is to form coalitions in its effort to bring a new culture. In that campaign for cultural change she said that 84 million people within the Commonwealth had seen a campaign video from NoMore.

A victim herself, she stated clearly, 'Whatever happened to us is not the totality of who we are!' She explained that she is a woman of privilege by her birth, race and Harvard education and it happened to

her, so it can happen to anyone. Men as well as women are part of NoMore. Survivors are the foundation of their work. She commented that mental health issues arising from abuse do not go away - even after 32 years.

Keith Best, representing the Chair of UPF-UK Board of Trustees and also Executive Committee member of the World Federalist Movement, said it is a tragedy that half of the world are not able to enjoy their rights. In the UK he added, the first woman MP was elected in 1918. He is inspired that the UK Government has ratified the Istanbul Convention. It places many aspects of domestic violence firmly within UK law. From its clauses custom, religion etc, cannot be used as excuses for violence against women. More and more there are consequences in law that are restricting violence against women and girls.

Bernie Davies LLB Hons CLE is the CEO and Founder of Bernie Davies Global Limited. She is a proponent of gender equality and supports women at risk. In her role of advisor to the Welsh Government, she advocates that it's imperative that all violence be eradicated and, in particular, violence against women.

She explained that she is an entrepreneur who has focussed on empowering other women to develop their businesses. Adding that domestic violence knows no bounds and finds its strength in the halls of privilege, she said that suffering is often silent even within law circles and among very privileged people. She referred to a powerful urge to keep uncomfortable truths within the home.

Chris Green OBE, who has been a regular speaker at UPF events on these occasions, is the founder of the 'Male Allies Challenging Sexism' as well as the founder of the White Ribbon campaign. He expressed his pleasure that the UK Government had ratified the Istanbul convention. We can use it to hold our Government to account. He added that it is a huge step but it has taken seven years since then Prime Minister, David Cameron, signed up to it. 35 European countries have signed up to it. Since then Turkey had dropped out.

He added, 'Today is the day, November 15th, that due to the 18% imbalance of men's and women's pay that women should stop working on this day of the year.'

He also explained that a Centre for Time Use Research at Oxford University found that on average men do 32% of the chores in the home. He encouraged men to do more housework and be a good role model to their children.

There were other testimonies of victims of domestic violence and sexual violence in conflict. It was painful to hear brave accounts of personal suffering. These accounts led to a sense of determination to continue to promote change in all the ways that are necessary. One account revealed that her husband after being confronted about his abusive behaviour had made efforts to change and was now a much more caring and loving person. This sharing was really appreciated by others.

Mrs. Ahlam Akram shared her own work founding 'Basira' to promote women's rights in the Arab world and the MENA region. She spoke of the abusive customs established by law based on religious traditions and interpretations from hundreds or thousands of years ago. She commented that the abuse is established to tarnish girls' life early and limit their expectations and life chances. She has experienced the value of living in the UK. She is going to campaign against Shariah Councils in the UK.

Remzije Dulli introduced an event planned in UPF UK venue on November 29th 4 pm - 6 pm focussing on the human rights of refugee women and girls.