

UPF London, UK Discusses Women's and Girls' Safety at the House of Lords

Robin Marsh
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London, United Kingdom -- A UPF event held in the House of Lords Committee Room commemorated the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls.

Baroness Sandip Verma, an appointed member of the House of Lords, was the host for the commemoration, held on **November 15, 2022**.



She emphasized that we must utilize Parliament to enact the necessary changes. Baroness Verma, a former spokesperson on women's equality issues for the House of Lords, has hosted a number of UPF events in the Palace of Westminster over the past decade to end gender discrimination by facilitating the cooperation of activists, NGOs and parliamentarians.

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. After **UPF-UK Director Margaret Ali** explained STORM's significance and activities, Ms. Hanson stated that domestic violence is a major focus of her work. She explained that her ex-husband had abused not only herself but also their daughter, and she said that his sentence was not enough. She feels strongly that the law has to be changed, particularly when abuse of children is involved.

Melissa Morbeck, the global director of partnerships at the NO MORE foundation as well as the executive director of the Corporate Alliance against Domestic Violence, spoke of the foundation's work as well as her own experience. She explained that NO MORE 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, 84 million people within the Commonwealth had seen a campaign video from NO MORE.

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 NO MORE. 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 the UPF-UK Board of Trustees and also a member of the World Federalist Movement's Executive Committee, 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, which places many aspects of domestic violence firmly within UK law. According to the Istanbul Convention, 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, the CEO and founder of Bernie Davies Global Limited, 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 focused 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, which, he said, can be used to hold the 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. Thirty-five European countries have signed up to it, although since then Turkey has dropped out.

He added, "Today is the day, November 15, that, due to the 18 percent imbalance of men's and women's pay, 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 percent 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 woman revealed that her husband, after being confronted about his abusive behavior, had made efforts to change and was now a much more caring and loving person. This testimony was really appreciated by others.

Ahlam Akram described her own work founding the non-profit organization BASIRA (British Arabs Supporting Universal Women's Rights) to promote women's rights in the Arab world and the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) 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 said that she has experienced the value of living in the UK and that she will campaign against shariah councils in the UK.

Remzije Dulli announced an event planned in a UPF-UK venue on 29 November focusing on the human rights of refugee women and girls.