



The Rt Hon David Davis MP
Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union
9 Downing Street
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24th October 2017

Dear Minister,

Re: Gender-blind negotiations surrounding the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

We write in our capacity as members of the United Kingdom (UK) Joint Committee on Women, which is the UK's national co-ordination to the European Women's Lobby and as organisations engaged with advancing women's equality and rights. We write to identify our concerns that women and gender as a topic of concern are absent from the Brexit negotiations.

As you will know, equality policies are among the most developed areas of social policy in Europe, and equality is foundational to the European Union. Equal pay for equal work was one of the founding principles in 1957 and it was, and continues to be, embedded in EU Treaties and Directives. Over the last 50 years, EU laws have been underpinned by the principles of equality and non-discrimination, which have promoted and protected women's rights in several areas, including the rights of part-time workers, the rights of pregnant women, and protections for women and girls who experience violence.

As the UK moves forward with its withdrawal from the EU, we grow increasingly concerned about the absence of women's voices and what that means for the erosion of women's rights in the UK. While we were encouraged to learn of gender parity in the Department for Exiting the EU, we are concerned that the commitment to gender balance is not extended to the UK negotiating team. The UK negotiating team biographies, as published by your Department, include only one woman among its nine members. While women represent 51 percent of the population and 32 percent of the UK Parliament, women form only 11 percent of the UK's negotiating team.

In June 2017, Catherine West MP raised a question about the gender composition of the negotiating team. Steve Baker MP responded and noted that the first round of negotiations, held on 19 June 2017, included 12 members, two of whom were women. Mr. Baker further wrote that the Department for Exiting the European Union was "drawing together expertise from a wide range of departments where there is specific relevant knowledge". Given the over-

representation of men on negotiating teams, it would be helpful if your department could set out its plans to ensure that women's lived experience forms part of negotiations. The UK Government has demonstrated its commitment to delivering 'a deal that works in the best interests of all citizens', a commitment which resonates well with us. It is difficult to understand, however, how this can be achieved when the voices of half of the UK's population are not represented at the negotiating table.

We urge your department to draw on the expertise of statutory equality bodies and civil society. It is vital that the two UK equality bodies, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission Northern Ireland, are substantively engaged as the negotiations proceed. Women's organisations in all of four nations are keen to work with the UK Government to provide informed support to ensure women's rights are protected. In the absence of a gender balanced negotiating team, and without statutory or third sector equalities experts involved in the work of the Department for Exiting the EU, we remain unconvinced that the rights of women will be adequately protected following the UK withdrawal from the EU. It is our concern that the current structures for exiting the EU will leave women both simultaneously exposed and invisible.

Our concerns for women's equality are particularly relevant in Northern Ireland, where there is currently no Executive and women have no channels through which to engage with your Department. Women in Northern Ireland are likely to be disproportionately affected including in respect of life, work, trade and conflict resolution and around the border across the island of Ireland.

In February 2017, the Women and Equalities Committee published its report 'Ensuring strong equalities legislation after the EU exit'. Among its findings, the Committee noted that 'ensuring that equality protections are maintained is not simply a matter of transposing existing EU law'. Civil society organisations across the UK have supported these findings and have made representations urging the Government to be cognisant of them in planning and negotiating the exiting arrangements. Despite the Committee's findings, as well as support for the findings by civil society organisations, the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill proposes to end the supremacy of EU law and to convert EU law into UK domestic law.

For 50 years, the EU has promoted gender equality and non-discrimination in policy and practice, and has consistently reaffirmed a commitment to promote and respect women's rights. The absence of the EU legal framework, coupled by an unclear direction of the UK on its review of domestic legislation post-Brexit, puts the rights of women and girls in the UK in a precarious position. As it stands, the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill will do exactly what equality experts have warned would be detrimental to women's equality and rights in the UK. To protect and promote women's rights, we strongly urge the UK Government to build a gender-balanced negotiating team, reflective of the UK's population. We call on you to commit to women's equality and women's rights as priorities for the UK-EU negotiating agenda and for the future post-Brexit UK.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Carwen Howells

Carwen Howells, Chair, UK Joint Committee on Women

Barbara Cleary, Vice Chair, National Association of Women's Organisations
Catherine Fookes, Director, Women's Equality Network Wales
Emma Johnston, Board Member / European Representative, Northern Ireland Women's European Platform - NIWEP
Emma Ritch, Executive Director, Engender
Jeanette Thornton, President, BPW Northern Ireland
Lynn Carvill, Chief Executive Officer, WOMEN'STEC
Anne McVicker, Director, Women's Resource & Development Agency – WRDA
Jan Melia, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
Sandy Brindley, Chief Executive, Rape Crisis Scotland
Bill Scott, Director of Policy, Inclusion Scotland
Tressa Burke, Chief Executive, Glasgow Disability Alliance
Talat Yaqoob, Chair, Women 50:50
Anna Ritchie Allan, Executive Director, Close the Gap
Ian Welsh OBE, Chief Executive, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)
Marsha Scott, Chief Executive, Scottish Women's Aid
Evelyn Fraser, Development Manager, Scottish Women's Convention
Fergus McMillan, Chief Executive, LGBT Youth Scotland
Tim Hopkins, Director, Equality Network
Katy Mathieson, Co-ordinator, Scottish Women's Rights Centre
Jackie Jones, Chair, Wales Assembly of Women
Lesley Abdela MBE, Senior Partner, Shevolution
Ahlam Akram, Director, BASIRA
Tanya Barron, CEO, Plan International UK
Dr Juliet Colman, Director, SecurityWomen
Britt Gustawsson, Risk Manager, Zonta Club London II
Annette Lawson, Chair, The Judith Trust/NAWO Ambassador
Eleanor Lisney, Co Director, Sisters of Frida
Lynda Dearlove, Chief Executive Officer, Women @ the Well
Eleri Butler, CEO, Welsh Women's Aid

c.c.:

The Rt Hon Justine Greening MP, Secretary of State for Education, UK Government
The Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, UK Government
The Rt Hon David Mundell MP, Secretary of State for Scotland, UK Government

The Rt Hon Alun Cairns MP, Secretary of State for Wales, UK Government

Michael Russell MSP, Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe, Scottish Government

Christina McKelvie MSP, Convener, Equality and Human Rights Committee, Scottish Parliament

Joan McAlpine MSP, Convener, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee, Scottish Parliament

Carl Sargeant AM, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, Welsh Government

John Griffiths AM, Chair, Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Welsh Assembly

David Rees AM, Chair, External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee, Welsh Assembly

The Rt Hon Maria Miller MP, Chair, Women and Equalities Committee, UK Parliament