**Jess Phillips MP, Minister for Safeguarding and VAWG:**

Dear Minister Phillips,

I hope you are keeping well.

My name is Bekhal Mahmod. I am a victim-survivor of ‘honour’-based abuse, and the sister of Banaz Mahmod, who was murdered in 2006 by my father, uncle – a powerful community leader, and five male cousins in an ‘honour killing’.

Banaz was killed simply because she left her abusive husband, who had raped and beaten her, and because she wanted to marry someone she loved. My family saw this as dishonour. They gathered in a so-called ‘council of war’ and plotted her murder, condemning her for seeking a divorce and for loving a man from another tribe.

Before she was killed, Banaz went to the police five times. She reported rape, violence, and repeated threats on her life. She even named the men who would go on to murder her. Yet she was ignored. In one incident, when her father tried to kill her, the police dismissed her as ‘manipulative’ and ‘melodramatic.’ Instead of protecting her, they went so far as to charge her with breaking a neighbour’s window while she was trying to escape.

I, too, survived an attempted ‘honour killing’ by my brother, which the police once again failed to investigate.

In 2008, the former Independent Police Complaints Commission found serious failings in how the police handled Banaz’s case. However, to dismay and anger, in two of the ‘worst failings’, a female police officer and her superior – an Inspector, were only issued with ‘words of advice’ by the police disciplinary body.

After Banaz’s death, with the support of Southall Black Sisters, I stood in court to give evidence against my father and uncle. I was the first daughter in this country to testify against her family in an ‘honour killing’ case. They were convicted, and for the first time, two men were extradited from Iraq to face justice here.

But justice never truly came for Banaz – her life was taken far too soon. And I, too, have paid a price for standing up to my family and community, now living in witness protection for the rest of my life.

Banaz’s case underscores a tragic pattern: victims of ‘honour’-based abuse are often missed, dismissed, or ignored by the very authorities meant to protect us.

And when Banaz was murdered, my community treated the killers as heroes. My uncle even said he had done ‘justice’ under the community’s ‘codes of honour’.

I want to make sure this does not happen again by ending ‘honour killings’ and ‘honour’-based abuse in our communities.

By challenging my family and my community, I hope to change cultural and religious attitudes on ‘honour’; and by demanding improvements in how agencies like the police, social services, and the courts deal with the problem, I hope to prevent more deaths and harm to Black, minority, and migrant women and girls.

That is why, with Southall Black Sisters, I am calling for Banaz’s Law.

By recognising ‘honour’-based abuse as a statutory aggravating factor in sentencing, accompanied by robust statutory guidance, Banaz’s Law would:

1. Increase victims’ confidence in the criminal justice system,
2. Ensure agencies do not ignore or minimise these cases out of fear, racism, or ignorance,
3. Prevent the use and acceptance of ‘honour’ as a defence for abuse or murder,
4. Help drive normative change in communities by showing that the state stands firmly with women and girls.

Without this recognition in law, victims will continue to be failed, just as Banaz was.

As Minister for Safeguarding and VAWG, you have a crucial role. Your government has promised to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. That cannot happen if Black, minority, and migrant women are left behind.

Recent announcements on ‘honour’-based abuse show commitment, but victim-survivors like me – and the organisations representing us – were not properly consulted. We need meaningful consultation with those directly affected. And we need Banaz’s Law to bring about the system-wide change that is long overdue.

I strongly support Southall Black Sisters’ amendment on Banaz’s Law under the Crime and Policing Bill, tabled by Kirith Entwistle MP with the support of over 50 MPs, and I want to see it turn into law. Given that you have led and supported the amendment under the Criminal Justice Bill in the past, this is an opportunity for us to turn that vision into reality by working together.

I would welcome the chance to meet with you, together with Southall Black Sisters, to discuss this further. Please share your availability with Hannana Siddiqui (hannana@southallblacksisters.co.uk) and Sanskriti Sanghi (sanskriti@southallblacksisters.co.uk).

I am speaking out so that no other woman or girl is failed like Banaz was.

Her death must not be in vain.

Yours sincerely,

Bekhal.

**Alex Davies-Jones MP, Minister for Victims and VAWG:**

Dear Minister Davies-Jones,

I hope you are keeping well.

My name is Bekhal Mahmod. I am a victim-survivor of ‘honour’-based abuse, and the sister of Banaz Mahmod, who was murdered in 2006 by my father, uncle – a powerful community leader, and five male cousins in an ‘honour killing’.

Banaz was killed simply because she left her abusive husband, who had raped and beaten her, and because she wanted to marry someone she loved. My family saw this as dishonour. They gathered in a so-called ‘council of war’ and plotted her murder, condemning her for seeking a divorce and for loving a man from another tribe.

Before she was killed, Banaz went to the police five times. She reported rape, violence, and repeated threats on her life. She even named the men who would go on to murder her. Yet she was ignored. In one incident, when her father tried to kill her, the police dismissed her as ‘manipulative’ and ‘melodramatic.’ Instead of protecting her, they went so far as to charge her with breaking a neighbour’s window while she was trying to escape.

I, too, survived an attempted ‘honour killing’ by my brother, which the police once again failed to investigate.

In 2008, the former Independent Police Complaints Commission found serious failings in how the police handled Banaz’s case. However, to dismay and anger, in two of the ‘worst failings’, a female police officer and her superior – an Inspector, were only issued with ‘words of advice’ by the police disciplinary body.

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But justice never truly came for Banaz – her life was taken far too soon. And I, too, have paid a price for standing up to my family and community, now living in witness protection for the rest of my life.

Banaz’s case underscores a tragic pattern: victims of ‘honour’-based abuse are often missed, dismissed, or ignored by the very authorities meant to protect us.

And when Banaz was murdered, my community treated the killers as heroes. My uncle even said he had done ‘justice’ under the community’s ‘codes of honour’.

I want to make sure this does not happen again by ending ‘honour killings’ and ‘honour’-based abuse in our communities.

By challenging my family and my community, I hope to change cultural and religious attitudes on ‘honour’; and by demanding improvements in how agencies like the police, social services, and the courts deal with the problem, I hope to prevent more deaths and harm to Black, minority, and migrant women and girls.

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Yours sincerely,

Bekhal.

**Kirith Entwistle MP:**

Dear Kirith Entwistle MP,

I hope you are keeping well.

My name is Bekhal Mahmod. I am a victim-survivor of ‘honour’-based abuse, and the sister of Banaz Mahmod, who was murdered in 2006 by my father, uncle – a powerful community leader, and five male cousins in an ‘honour killing’.

I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for tabling the amendment on Banaz’s Law to the Crime and Policing Bill, on behalf of Southall Black Sisters and me.

As you know, Banaz was killed simply because she left her abusive husband, who had raped and beaten her, and because she wished to marry someone she loved. My family viewed this as dishonour. They convened a so-called ‘council of war’ and plotted her murder, condemning her for seeking a divorce and for loving a man from another tribe.

Before she was killed, Banaz went to the police five times. She reported rape, violence, and repeated threats to her life. She even named the men who would later murder her. Yet she was ignored. In one incident, after her father attempted to kill her, the police dismissed her as ‘manipulative’ and ‘melodramatic.’ Instead of protecting her, they charged her with breaking a neighbour’s window as she tried to escape.

I, too, survived an attempted ‘honour killing’ by my brother, which the police once again failed to investigate.

In 2008, the former Independent Police Complaints Commission found serious failings in the way Banaz’s case was handled. To my dismay and anger, in two of the ‘worst failings’, a female officer and her superior – an Inspector, were issued nothing more than ‘words of advice’ by the police disciplinary body.

After Banaz’s death, with the support of Southall Black Sisters, I stood in court to give evidence against my father and uncle. I was the first daughter in this country to testify against her family in an ‘honour killing’ case. They were convicted, and for the first time, two men were extradited from Iraq to face justice here.

But justice never truly came for Banaz – her life was stolen far too soon. And I, too, have paid a price for standing up to my family and community, now living in witness protection for the rest of my life.

Banaz’s case underscores a tragic pattern: victims of ‘honour’-based abuse are too often missed, dismissed, or ignored by the very authorities meant to protect us.

And when Banaz was murdered, my community treated the killers as heroes. My uncle even claimed he had carried out ‘justice’ under the community’s ‘codes of honour’.

I want to make sure this does not happen again by ending ‘honour killings’ and ‘honour’-based abuse in our communities.

By challenging my family and community, I hope to change cultural and religious attitudes on ‘honour’. And by demanding improvements in how agencies such as the police, social services, and the courts respond, I hope to prevent more deaths and protect Black, minority, and migrant women and girls.

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Without this recognition in law, victims will continue to be failed, just as Banaz was.

I thank you for recognising the significance of this amendment and for rallying over 50 MPs to stand in solidarity with me and Southall Black Sisters in commemorating Banaz. I would greatly value your continued support in working with us to engage Lords and Peers in tabling this amendment during its passage through the House of Lords after the parliamentary recess. I would also welcome your help in championing the introduction of Banaz’s Law, urging the government to adopt it as an urgent measure to assure Black, minority, and migrant women that we have not been forgotten.

I would be grateful for the chance to meet with you, together with Southall Black Sisters, to discuss this further. Please share your availability with Hannana Siddiqui (hannana@southallblacksisters.co.uk) and Sanskriti Sanghi (sanskriti@southallblacksisters.co.uk).

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Yours sincerely,

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**VAWG Sector:**

Dear Sisters,

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My name is Bekhal Mahmod. I am a victim-survivor of ‘honour’-based abuse, and the sister of Banaz Mahmod, who was murdered in 2006 by my father, uncle – a powerful community leader, and five male cousins in an ‘honour killing’.

I am writing to request your support in urging the government to prioritise the introduction of Banaz’s Law – a statutory aggravating factor in sentencing for ‘honour’-based abuse, supported by robust statutory guidance. This must form part of the government’s mission to halve violence against women and girls, ensuring that Black, minority, and migrant women are not left behind.

As you know, Banaz was killed simply because she left her abusive husband, who had raped and beaten her, and because she wished to marry someone she loved. My family viewed this as dishonour. They convened a so-called ‘council of war’ and plotted her murder, condemning her for seeking a divorce and for loving a man from another tribe.

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Without this recognition in law, victims will continue to be failed, just as Banaz was.

I strongly support Southall Black Sisters’ amendment on Banaz’s Law to the Crime and Policing Bill, tabled by Kirith Entwistle MP with the backing of over 50 MPs, and I want to see it turned into law. I would greatly value your support for the amendment – by endorsing the accompanying campaign briefing prepared by Southall Black Sisters, which will be sent to Ministers, MPs, and members of the House of Lords to demonstrate broad sector support. I would also value your voice in supporting Banaz’s Law in high-level stakeholder forums, as well as amplifying the campaign’s message on social media.

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**Killed Women:**

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Yours sincerely,

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