

Speeches from Southall Black Sisters' Vigil to End Femicide – 25 November 2025

Bekhal Mahmud (for Banaz Mahmud)

"Banaz was a beautiful woman – loving, caring, truly one-of-a-kind. She had a light that could fill any room and a heart that touched so many lives. Words alone cannot capture who she was; you had to know her to understand the depth of her spirit.

Tragically, her life was taken by my own family – my father, uncle, cousins, and extended relatives. She should have been protected by those who were meant to care for her, but instead, they stole her life. They claimed to act in the name of 'honour,' but all Banaz had done was speak out against the abuse she suffered in her marriage and choose her own partner.

The system failed her too – social services, the NHS, schools, the police – everyone let her down. They did not understand her experience of 'honour'-based abuse. Even though she reported her fears to the police five times before her murder, naming those responsible, she was never taken seriously. Their ignorance and denial ultimately cost her life. It's one thing to not understand someone's culture; it's another to deny the truth. Institutions must acknowledge their failures and learn from them.

Banaz's loss has stayed with me, and it always will. Having faced a similar journey growing up, and having escaped it, I know what she endured. Despite threats to my life and the lives of my loved ones, I gave evidence against my own family, ensuring their convictions, even though it meant living the rest of my days in a witness protection scheme.

Her death – and the deaths of countless women lost to men's violence – fills me with profound sorrow and righteous anger. The government and authorities could have protected her, could have saved her, but their failures contributed to her death, as they have for too many women.

For over five years, I have campaigned with Southall Black Sisters for major reform in Banaz's name. We call it Banaz's Law: a demand for 'honour'-based abuse to be treated as an aggravating factor in sentencing, supported by multi-agency statutory guidance. This law is vital to ensure Black, minority, and migrant victims can trust the criminal justice system, that agencies and courts respond effectively, perpetrators are held accountable, and communities recognise the need for change.

Banaz's Law means everything to me. I fight in her name to protect anyone who may face similar injustice and discrimination. I urge the government to make Banaz's Law a priority, to support our campaign, and to enact this law without delay.

We must not let Banaz's life be lost in vain. Today, though I cannot be with you in person because of my witness protection status, I am with you in spirit. Together, we remember all the beautiful women we have lost and say – no more.

My heart is with you, and I thank every one of you for coming to pay respects our loved ones and support our work to ensure no other woman suffers as they did."

Yasmin Javed (for Fawziyah Javed)

"Fawziyah was not only my daughter, but also my best friend and confidant. Many who saw us together thought we were friends. We shared a very close bond and did everything together. She was the perfect daughter, niece, granddaughter, cousin, and friend – the centre of our world and our heartbeat. In our family, she was the glue that held us together. She was our everything.

She was a beautiful soul, inside and out – kind-hearted, selfless, and philanthropic. She was successful, an academic achiever, and an accomplished woman. She had a great sense of humour, and she was loving, caring, and described by many as a truly amazing and wonderful person, a joy to be around.

I could spend all day speaking about the incredible charity work she did, often quietly and without recognition. People have come forward since her death to tell me how humble she was – she never spoke of the help she gave. She touched everyone she met, leaving a mark even on those she knew only briefly. She was well-liked and popular; I have never known anyone to have cause to say Fawziyah was unpleasant. She didn't have a bad bone in her body.

Losing Fawziyah to her abuser's violence has destroyed our lives. Our hearts are shattered, and we are devastated. The grief has brought us to our knees. It is like a shadow we carry wherever we go. We will never fully recover from this. Every woman murdered not only loses her life, but, as someone's daughter, sister, grandchild, niece, cousin, and sometimes mother, leaves behind loved ones burdened with a lifetime of grief and pain.

I demand justice in Fawziyah's name so that no other family has to endure what we went through. Violence against women and girls is an epidemic that must be stopped, and the government has a responsibility to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised Black and minoritised women who face additional barriers to safety and support are not left behind. Fawziyah's experience shows how these women's cases are often not treated with the seriousness they deserve, leaving them exposed to grave harm – a reality that led to the devastating outcome in our daughter's case. Experiences of 'honour'-based abuse, in particular, are neither understood nor taken with the seriousness they demand.

This is why, in Fawziyah's name, I am calling for a statutory definition of 'honour'-based abuse to be legislated as part of the Crime and Policing Bill, with the involvement of the specialist 'by and for' sector. Having lost Fawziyah and her unborn child, and seeing the perpetrator receive a sentence that does not reflect the severity of this double murder, I also support Banaz's Law where Bekhal Mahmud and Southall Black Sisters are campaigning for 'honour' to be treated as an aggravating factor in sentencing.

The Government must work with us and specialist organisations to make ending violence against all women and girls a priority. Women and girls trapped in abusive relationships must not continue to be failed, and our loved ones' deaths must not be in vain. I commend Southall Black Sisters for organising this vigil to remember the women lost to men's violence, especially Black, minoritised and migrant women, who are so often forgotten and erased from public memory.

I am saddened that I cannot be there in person, but I pay tribute to my daughter and to all other women who have lost their lives to men's violence – we will not give up fighting for you."

Linda Westcarr (for Kennedy Westcarr-Sabaroche)

"I stand before you as a mother whose world was shattered. My daughter, Kennedy Westcarr-Sabaroche, was killed by her partner leaving behind a child — my grandchild. Kennedy was failed by the very systems that were supposed to protect her in life and those same systems have failed her in death. She was denied the safety she deserved, and in the end, she was denied justice. No mother should have to carry this pain. No family should ever be left fighting alone.

Today, we honour Kennedy's life, and the lives of all Black, minoritised, and migrant women whose stories are silenced, overlooked, or dismissed. We stand for the women who warned, who asked for help, and who were not heard.

I am here because change must come. Our laws, our institutions, and our government have to do better. I support the vital work and campaign of Southall Black Sisters and Killed Women to end femicide and I support the call for urgent amendments to the Crime and Policing and Victims and Courts Bills — changes that could save lives, changes that might have saved my daughter's life.

Together, we remember. Together, we demand justice. And together, we fight for a future where every woman and every girl is protected."

David Challen

"Thank you to Southall Black Sisters for bringing us together today.

My name is David Challen. I am an adult child survivor of domestic abuse and a campaigner who speaks about male violence against women and girls, and the impact it has on children.

In 2019 I helped fight to free my mother, Sally Challen, after almost a decade in prison for killing my father following forty years of coercive control. His abuse led her into a loss of control the courts still failed to understand today. Her successful appeal became a landmark moment because it forced the courts to confront the reality of abused women who kill their tormentors and to finally recognise the true weight of psychological abuse.

Coercive control is the foundation of domestic abuse. It strips confidence, isolates you from family and friends, and reduces your world to fear long before physical violence ever begins.

At the moment my mum was released she told the world:

"There are many women inside for murder when it should be manslaughter, and I know because I've met them."

She was right. I too have met women who lived for years on the edge. Women pushed to breaking point. Who confided they too were on the precipice of that moment. Women whose abuse was never recognised by the system.

They are still in cells today.

Their trauma ignored.

Their voices never heard.

My mother's case did not stand alone. It stood on the shoulders of women who came before her, like Kiranjit Ahluwalia.

Kiranjit lived through that same terror. Violence, humiliation, sexual abuse and complete isolation. The courts treated her as a cold-blooded killer rather than a woman failed by a society that treats women murdered by men as ACCEPTABLE.

The campaign led by Southall Black Sisters, with Justice for Women, changed what the system could no longer deny. It exposed how long histories of abuse shape a woman's actions. It revealed the bias within the law. It reshaped the landscape that later allowed my mum's case to be understood.

Without the courage of Kiranjit and the leadership of SBS I do not believe my mother would have walked free.

Yet after her appeal, when the CCRC promised to review more than three thousand murder convictions, not one case has been referred back to the Court of Appeal.

Not one woman's case has had evidence of abuse that was overlooked at trial?

I stand here as the son of my mother, and my father when I say this:

This is a system that refuses to confront the toll this abuse takes.

Yet, there is another truth this country has avoided for too long:

More women die through domestic abuse related suicide than are killed by partners.

The case of Michelle Sparman makes this impossible to ignore. Michelle lived with what the coroner recognised as "justifiable feelings of abuse". Her death was contributed to by domestic abuse and this must be named.

In reality, this is MURDER by another name.

This is why the work of Southall Black Sisters on domestic abuse related suicide matters, calling for the law to finally recognise these deaths, to count them, investigate them and prevent them.

And I support this, because I know exactly what coercive control does to a woman's mind.

*My mother lived it.
She tried to end her life aged 21.
Many women still live it.*

In this moment, and in this climate, those most at risk are Black, migrant and minoritised women and their children.

The Project Resist report published earlier this year confirmed what many feared.

After the far right riots:

- *Women were forced back indoors*
- *Families relived the fear they thought they had escaped*
- *Children described themselves as prisoners in their homes*
- *Black, migrant and minoritised women were pushed further out of sight.*

Yet at same time the Home Secretary is rolling back protections for refugees and asylum seekers.

Southall Black Sisters have warned these changes will have life threatening consequences.

These reforms mean:

- *Erosion of Article Eight protections*
- *Removal of support for people seeking asylum*
- *Policies that trap victims inside abusive homes*
- *A system that punishes women for their immigration status rather than protects them*

*These are not abstract ideas.
This will trap women in violence.
This will strip away their rights.
And it will make escape almost impossible.*

There is an active campaign of the othering of domestic abuse perpetrators. That these are imported harms, wilfully ignoring the stone cold storied truth these perpetrators are KNOWN to the victim.

When the state removes human rights protections the consequences fall hardest on the most vulnerable: women with the least power to defend themselves.

This is the world Southall Black Sisters are working in. Their work is not history. Their work is today's frontline defence for Black, migrant and minoritised women and children.

*Their fight for Kiranjit shaped the landscape that allowed my mum's case to be understood.
Their work on domestic abuse related suicide exposes a crisis that demands urgent action.
Their leadership during this hostile shift in asylum policy is saving lives, right now.*

I stand with them because the women who are unseen pay the highest price.

*To the families here today.
Your loved ones mattered.
They still matter.
Their names demand honesty.
Their stories demand justice.*

If this country wants to be judged on its values then judge it by the women and children it pushes into hiding.

*Judge it by the survivors forced underground.
Judge it by the communities abandoned when they most needed protection.*

*We owe it to Kiranjit.
We owe it to Michelle.
We owe it to every woman remembered here today. And we owe it to every woman alive who still cannot speak.*

Thank you."

Sonia Dabas (for Harshita Brella)

"Harshita was a hardworking, honest, and diligent young woman with a pure heart and a vibrant, joyful spirit. She meant everything to us. She was the world's best sister – there could never be anyone like her, no one with whom I could share all that I wanted to. Our family misses her every single day. It is incredibly difficult for us to go on without her; her loss has left us completely broken.

I saw the IOPC statement, and it feels insufficient to me. I have been saying that the UK police let Harshita down, and now this has been officially confirmed by the IOPC statement. We know Harshita used to call and no one would pick up. And if they did, they would say the officer she asked for was on leave. They told her they would come to meet her, and they never did. She even took leave from work. She was severely ignored.

Now they are making these announcements and framing them as if a mistake was made, but they are not accepting that true accountability requires giving this case priority and setting an example to prevent another abuser like Pankaj Lamba. This case is not old enough for the evidence to have disappeared. The UK police should show seriousness and work to improve, not simply acknowledge a mistake.

The fight for justice has been unbearably hard. It has been over a year, yet there has been no update in her case. Neither the UK police nor the Indian police are helping us. My request is simple: that Harshita receives justice. I want to appeal that the police whose negligence allowed Harshita to fall through the cracks must, if they truly feel remorse, ensure that she is given the justice she deserves. The failures of the UK government must be acknowledged and addressed, and urgent safeguards put in place so this never happens to any other woman or girl.

Migrant women and girls come to the UK with so many dreams, and it is the UK government's duty to ensure they feel safe and protected. I want to see an example being set so that women like Harshita are safe in the UK."

Ghadah Alnasseri (Executive Director, Imkaan)

"Today, we gather to remember the women we have lost, to honour their lives, and to stand with the women who are still here fighting to survive.

Domestic abuse doesn't just leave bruises or broken homes. It can push women to the very edge and increase the risk of homicide and suicide. Imkaan's Life or Death report found that Black and minoritised women face a higher risk of being killed because systems too often block or delay their access to safety highlighted by yesterday's Independent Office for Police Conduct findings on police failings in the death of Harshita Brela.

We also found that more women take their own lives because of domestic abuse than are killed by their perpetrators.

These deaths are real. They are devastating. And yet, far too many Black and minoritised women remain almost entirely invisible. Too many die in ways that could have been prevented, while the very systems meant to keep them safe fail them.

At Imkaan, in our report Why Should Our Rage Be Tidy?, Black and minoritised women spoke about the impact that abuse, racism, and neglect take on their mental health. They described what it feels like to ask for help and not be believed, or to be supported by services that were never designed for their needs.

Way too many women only become visible to the system when they are already in crisis through criminalisation, detention under the Mental Health Act, or other extreme interventions. By the time the government sees them, they are already at breaking point. It should never get that far.

The same barriers that keep women trapped in abuse, like discrimination, immigration restrictions and the lack of specialist by and for support, are the same barriers that push some Black and minoritised women to a place of deep harm. If we don't face this reality, we cannot hope to prevent these deaths. This is why sustained funding for specialist by and for Black and minoritised services is so urgently needed.

These services are essential, not optional. They save lives. They understand women's realities in a way mainstream services cannot, and they fight every day advocating for change. Yet they are still forced to work with insecure funding and barriers that make long-term planning almost impossible. This is not just unfair. It is deadly.

The barriers that prevent organisations from delivering life-saving support are the same barriers that put women's lives at risk. Survivors deserve better.

Today, we honour those organisations and the women they serve. But we cannot stop at

honouring. We must act. We must fight for structural change that removes barriers, secures long-term funding, and ensures that the leadership, expertise, and lived experience of Black and minoritised women are at the centre of the fight against violence.

Ending violence against women and girls and preventing homicide and suicides cannot happen if we ignore these truths. It cannot happen if we fail to listen to those who are closest to the pain. And it cannot happen if we continue to make their struggles invisible.

We owe it to the survivors. We owe it to the women we have lost. And we owe it to the women who will come after them. Thank you."

Ayse Hussein (for Jan Mustafa)

"Firstly, I would like to thank Southall Black sisters for representing Jan in my absence today, I really appreciate your ongoing support and kindness.

My beautiful Jan was only 38 years old when she went missing, for one year we begged and begged for help from the police, we would have potential sightings, they would just shrug us off and say stop looking into it, it is not her, so we would make them aware we will investigate, they never said no or stopped us, we would put ourselves in danger and they didn't even care or stop us.

I asked if we could do an appeal, they said NO, I asked if we could put up a reward, they said NO, I asked for missing posters, I was promised only 100 and can you guess how many were printed for my missing cousin NONE. The words we would hear for one year from the police was: it's on my to do list!

She was deemed MEDIUM RISK for one year, we told them something has happened to her this is serious she would not leave her kids, they said she will come back when she is ready, when other WHITE females would go missing and be deemed high risk within weeks with so much publicity, JAN TO THEM WAS NO ONE, SHE WAS INVISIBLE.

A year later, the police attended a call out about concerns and wellbeing of a male that was not well and not seen for a few days, they knocked no one answered they left, it was reported again they went and this time broke in, while the officer was walking around the flat he opened a cupboard that had a locked chest freezer, he went and got a crow bar and opened it, JAN was finally discovered.

When taking the freezer to the mortuary it was scanned with an x ray machine, underneath Jan another young beautiful Henriett had been inside for 3 years. Both these 2 helpful women went through horrific torture and killed by a known sex offender that had over 20 years history of abusing children and women. The MET were monitoring him in his home every few months to make sure women were kept safe if they would attend his home. They walked past 2 dead females for 3 years with Jan's handbag in the hallway floor with her medication inside with a sticker dated just a day before she was reported missing.

This monster was Jan's neighbor and his number was on her phone records while she was missing, what do you think the police did, all they did was put a card through his card asking

him to call when he is free, they believed his lies even after his history and asked no more questions.

He went to court and only got 38 years for 2 murders and 2 unlawful burials.

He caused so many problems throughout the trial and played the system making us suffer nonstop, he didn't attend sentencing so we read out our impact statements to an invisible dock while he was allowed to stay in his cell. I have now campaigned with 3 other families to change the law to force them out and have time added on and prison privileges removed, this is currently being signed off in parliament and should be in force next year so no other families have to go through what we did.

From the time Jan went missing to the time she was found we experienced racism and misogyny, we were neglected as a family and JAN WAS NOT A PRIOROTY TO THEM.

Myself and other families work and campaign night and day to raise awareness of the cruel behaviour we experienced and trying to put things right so this doesn't happen to others.

I will not stop campaigning and will hold the police to account for the loss of Jan, if they did their job properly my beautiful cousin would be here with us today.

Families who lose a loved one go through the grief of losing a loved one, and then we have the extras of neglect, being ignored, no support, failings nonstop, racism, when will this stop, will they ever learn.

Jan's dream was to help others; I am now fulfilling that dream and keeping her memory and legacy alive.

Thank you for listening to our heartbreaking loss."

Onjali Rauf (for Mumtahina Ruma Jannat)

"In July 2011, my aunt, Mumtahina Ruma Jannat, had her life taken from her. In her own home. By the very man she had warned countless social workers, countless police officers, countless lawyers and countless judges about, over the course of five whole years, of her short twenty-nine year old life.

She did EVERYTHING she was supposed to do, and fought for five whole years to be believed. Only for each of the – largely White men in uniforms and judges' robes – to dismiss, belittle, and even mock her in the very courts and police stations she went to for help.

Would she have been treated differently had her skin been White? Would her chances of being saved gone up a few notches, had her hair not been jet black, or her clothes not been a salwar kameez? We all know the answer to those questions. And what's even more heartbreaking is, SHE knew the answer to those questions.

In her very last court hearing, where a judge called her a 'silly woman' for daring to express

her fears for herself and her two little girls, she left the courtroom in tears, telling us: “To them I’m just a silly Brown woman in a scarf. So I give up. And now, because of them, he’s going to kill me.”

I know for a fact that the racisms my aunt had to bear at the hands of officers and members of the judiciary alike, year after year, resulted directly in her murder.

I know for a fact they could have prevented her from being killed, and stopped her daughters – then but six and eight year olds, from becoming, effectively, orphans.

Now, fourteen years later, witnessing so LITTLE being done to save women and children from violent men, I want to say this. To EVERY police officer, lawyer and judge whose actions and IN-actions have led to women’s lives being taken from them by often known-of violent men: your time is up.

Ruma’s Rules – also being launched to the government today - are coming for you. Because TOO MANY of you STILL don’t get that Women who aren’t White are STILL women – equally deserving of help and LIFE. And that NONE of our lives are yours to dismiss and be shrugged over. Not. Any. More.”