



27 March 2020

Dear [Hotel CEO]

Covid-19 and safety for women and children facing domestic abuse

We are writing to you on behalf of organisations from the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector, who provide protection and support to thousands of women and children in the UK, to ask for your help.

As a result of coronavirus, thousands of women and children across the country face the prospect of being forced to stay at home for several months with an abusive partner, husband, or family member.

We know that in times of conflict and crisis, the rate of domestic abuse, sexual abuse (including child sexual abuse) and exploitation, doubles and even triples against women and children. Data from China, for example, shows that during the epidemic, domestic violence increased three times over. We are worried that many of the women and children that Southall Black Sisters and other women's groups work with will be forced to stay in already abusive households, and that the stress and anxiety caused by Covid-19 might also mean that other women and children become subject to abuse for the first time. There is a risk that Covid-19 will not be the only epidemic we have to deal with in the coming months - we are facing an epidemic of abuse.

Women, like this recent caller to Southall Black Sisters, will have to live in unbearable conditions of abuse and isolation:

"I don't know how long this situation with the virus will last but I'm sure that it's going to be difficult and very stressful for us. It is not obvious and tricky, the gaslighting and the crazy making... I've reached a point like today when my hands are shaking during an argument and I can't stop it! I need your help and your experience to make this self-isolation bearable for me and my son."

You can prevent such experiences from happening to more women and children - or at the very least, limit the scale of the problem. You can make a difference to some of the most vulnerable women who otherwise have no one to turn to for security, comfort and support.

One of the main reasons why women and children struggle to escape domestic abuse is because they do not have an alternative safe place to stay. Refuges are unable to cope with current levels of demand; 64% of referrals to refuges in England were declined in 2018-19. Migrant women find it especially difficult to seek shelter because they have no recourse to public funds and cannot access government benefits or housing, meaning they have no safe accommodation and no money with which to meet their basic needs.

While the rooms of your hotel are unoccupied, will you offer a hotel in a publicly undisclosed space, free of charge, to women fleeing a domestic abuser so that they are safe and secure? Specialist women's support services would need to have an ongoing role in supporting women and children in any such hotel bed scheme to ensure it was safe.

You will no doubt have already heard that Gary Neville is allowing NHS workers to stay in the rooms of his hotels if they need protection from a family infected with Covid-19. London Mayor Sadiq Khan is also working with Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG) to [block-book rooms for rough sleepers](#). Similarly compassionate leadership is needed to protect women and children at risk from a very different epidemic - the epidemic of domestic abuse.

Our aim with this letter is to ensure that those women and children who need it have immediate protection. We are also calling on Government to lead on national action with the Violence Against Women and Girls sector and migrant organisations to ensure sustainable solutions for those who face abuse amidst this crisis. We know your offer of help may help to push the Government to act.

We would gladly work with you to make this scheme work.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

Pragna Patel
Director
Southall Black Sisters

Jennifer Nadal
Co-Director
Compassion in Politics

With support from:

1. Claire Waxman, London Victim's Commissioner
2. Nicki Norman, Acting Co-Chief Executive, Women's Aid Federation of England
3. Suzanne Jacob, CEO, SafeLives
4. Dr C Quinn, CEO, Rape Crisis England & Wales
5. Yasmin Rehman, CEO, Juno Woman's Aid

6. Sarah Green, Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition
7. Baljit Banga, Executive Director, Imkaan
8. Natasha Walter and Marchu Girma, Directors, Women for Refugee Women
9. Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director, UK Women's Budget Group
10. Priya Chopra, Chief Executive, Saheli
11. Gisela Valle, Director, Latin American Women's Rights Service
12. Sandhya Sharma, Group Coordinator, Safety4Sisters
13. Nik Noone, CEO, Galop
14. Rena Sodhi, Interim Director, London Black Women's Project
15. Diana Nammi, Executive Director, IKWRO
16. Nicola Sharp-Sheffs, CEO, Surviving Economic Abuse
17. Karen Ingala Smith, CEO, NIA
18. Umme Immam, Executive Director, The Angelou Centre
19. Sam Smethers, Chief Executive, Fawcett Society
20. Sarbjit Ganger, Director, Asian Women's Resource Centre
21. Shaminder Ubhi, Director, Ashiana Network
22. Samsunear Ali, Head of National Services, Bawso
23. Vivienne Hayes, CEO, WRC
24. Jemima Olchawski, CEO, Agenda
25. Eunice Manu, WAST Co-ordinator, WAST Manchester
26. Harriet Wistrich, Founding Director, Centre For Women's Justice
27. Diana Covey MBE, Chief Executive, AVA
28. Dawn Jeffrey, Director, Welsh Women's Aid
29. Fiona Dwyer, CEO, Solace Woman's Aid
30. Jo Todd, Chief Executive Officer, Respect
31. Zlakha Ahmed, Chief Executive, Apna Haq
32. Estelle du Boulay, Director, Rights of Women
33. Christine McNaught, CEO, FWT – A Centre for Women
34. Kate Allen, CEO, Amnesty International
35. Councillor Dr Kindy Sandhu, Labour and Co-operative Council, Coventry Council