



PRESS RELEASE

27 March 2020

Women’s campaigners and organisations call on hotels to offer rooms to women and children trapped in homes with domestic abusers

Women’s rights campaigners have [written to major hotel chains](#) asking them to offer their beds to women and children fleeing domestic abuse who would otherwise be trapped with them during the Coronavirus lockdown.

They say that there is a risk of an “epidemic of abuse” taking off in the coming weeks as women are forced to stay indoors with abusive husbands, partners and family members because of self-isolation, home-working, and possible reduced job hours. They also point to evidence from China which shows that rates of domestic abuse have tripled since the lockdown there.

The letter from Southall Black Sisters and the organisation Compassion in Politics, has been endorsed by a coalition of key organisations including Women’s Aid Federation of England, Rape Crisis England and Wales, Welsh Women’s Aid, Fawcett Society and Women for Refugee Women. It also has the support of the Domestic Abuse and the Victim’s Commissioners, as well as Jess Phillips MP and Carolyn Harris MP.

The campaigners make reference to the example set by Gary Neville who has announced that he will allow NHS workers to stay in the empty rooms of his hotel chain if they need to stay away from infected family members while still going to work.

The letter says:

“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 relationships and 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.

“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.

“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?”

The letter quotes a recent caller to Southall Black Sisters who said:

"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."

Pragna Patel, Director of Southall Black Sisters, said:

"This is an unprecedented crisis. It is hitting the most vulnerable members of our society the hardest. Self-isolation at home poses serious and significant risks to women and children in violent and abusive households. Now, more than ever, we cannot abandon our responsibility to them. Now, more than ever, we must show solidarity and offer all the help and support that we can muster."

Jennifer Nadel, Co-Director of Compassion in Politics, said:

"Women in violent relationships are in even more grave danger during this crisis. Now is the time for compassion. Hotels making their rooms available could quite literally save lives."

Jess Phillips MP said:

"We must work together at this moment of crisis. The coming weeks or months of lock down and self-isolation leave those in abusive relationships in grave danger. Hotels have an opportunity to throw a lifeline to vulnerable women and children, to offer a place of safety, at a time when they need it the most."

Carolyn Harris MP said:

"Never have we needed so many to provide for those in need. Victims of domestic violence must have a way out. They must know that we are looking after them. Please do everything and anything to help victims and vulnerable."

END

For further information contact:

Pragna Patel and Janaya Walker, Southall Black Sisters: pragna@southallblacksisters.co.uk.
janaya@southallblacksisters.co.uk – 07985399740 and 07947304221

Jennifer Nadel, Compassion in Politics: jennifer.nadel@compassioninpolitics.com –
07970870026

NOTES

1. Southall Black Sisters is one of the UK's leading women's organisations for black and minority ethnic (BME) women. Established in 1979 we went on to set up an advice, resource, campaigning and advocacy centre with a particular focus on South Asian women. Whilst based in West London, we have a national reach. Our work by its very nature addresses issues of multiple or intersectional discrimination, involving the simultaneous experience of race, sex and other forms of discrimination. The bulk of our work is directed at assisting women and children - the overwhelming victims of domestic and other forms of gender-related violence - obtain effective protection and assert their fundamental human rights.

2. Compassion in Politics Compassion in Politics is a cross-party organisation working to put compassion, cooperation, and inclusion at the heart of politics:

<https://www.compassioninpolitics.com>