



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
**WESTMINSTER FOUNDATION  
FOR DEMOCRACY**

## **International Summit to Address Violence Against Women in Politics**

19 and 20 March 2018  
Wolfson Room, 10-11 Carlton House Terrace  
London SW1Y 5AH

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### ***Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences***

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#### **Overview**

Recognising that violence against politically active women in politics is widespread, and that no country or political party is immune from the problem, the political party offices of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) organised a two-day international summit on *Violence Against Women in Politics* in London on 19-20 March 2018.

Featuring 54 speakers and 150 delegates from over 20 countries<sup>1</sup>, including senior leaders from across the United Kingdom's (UK) political spectrum<sup>2</sup>, the objectives of the event were to:

- Identify the sources of violence against women's political activity, including global similarities and localised differences; and
- Construct recommendations and build consensus around practical measures that bodies with authority and responsibility can take to prevent and address violence against women's activism and leadership in politics and public life.

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<sup>1</sup> Argentina, Burundi, Canada, Egypt, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Malawi, Malaysia, Pakistan, Palestine, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sweden, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States.

<sup>2</sup> The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, the Conservative Party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Green Party of England and Wales (GPEW), the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales), the Scottish National Party (SNP), Sinn Fein and the Women's Equality Party.

Uniquely, the conversation was led by political practitioners, including members of parliament (MPs), political party leaders, civil society activists, and leading academics from around the world. WFD also engaged experts from the key international organisations<sup>3</sup> working on this issue to speak on or moderate the conference's panel sessions.

The panel sessions addressed the following topics:

- [How parliaments prevent and combat violence against politically active women](#);
- [Violence against women during elections \(VAWE\)](#);
- [The cost of politics; online abuse of politically active women](#);
- [How women in party youth wings are affected](#);
- [The civil society perspective on violence against women in politics \(VAWP\)](#); and,
- [The role and responsibilities of political parties in tackling violence against politically active women](#).

A [research report](#)<sup>4</sup>, including content from eight global case studies<sup>5</sup>, was launched at the conference to showcase best practice within political parties in tackling this issue.

The findings, experiences and recommendations from the conference have been collated into this report and is respectfully submitted for consideration by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences for her special report on violence against women in politics.

**[Part One](#)** of this report outlines and summarises the findings and recommendations that emerged from the conference overall.

**[Part Two](#)** offers an overview of the topics and key points from each of the eight sessions, as well as access to the content of four keynote speeches. This section also contains personal stories from many of the speakers and contributors, whose experiences as politically active women are understood to be of particular interest to the Special Rapporteur.

The organisers of and contributors to this conference would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for her initiative in this important area. We are happy to do whatever we can to assist in this effort to end violence against politically active women.

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<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, CARE International UK, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Oxfam.

<sup>4</sup> The full report can be found at: <http://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Violence-Against-Women-in-Politics-Global-Perspectives-of-a-Global-Issue.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Argentina, Ghana, Jamaica, Lebanon, Malawi, Sri Lanka, UK and Ukraine.



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## Part One: Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The conference produced a rich collection of ideas, experiences, research and recommendations. Participants in this conference spoke consistently of the need to create a 'new normal' around how women in politics are perceived and treated.

*Findings include the following:*

- The forms of and dynamics behind VAWP are localised but the experience is universal.
- Globally, women pay a higher price for their participation in politics, including having to meet higher standards and facing more personalised, and often sexualised, forms of scrutiny and criticism.
- Discussion of social media platforms dominated this conference. It was agreed that social media platforms are facilitating growing levels of psychological violence as well as physical and sexualised threats. Many contributors to the conference found the platforms themselves either complicit in the abuse or offering little more than an anaemic response.
  - There were multiple calls for a legislative or regulatory response to this situation, but also recognition that it was not yet clear what kind of legislated response would be effective. Specific suggestions for regulations can be found in Session 1.
  - There was a generation gap among participants about the importance of social media. Older participants were more likely to say that simply walking away from or boycotting offending platforms was the best response. Younger participants did not see this as an option; digital media is too much a part of how they live their lives and communicate with their peers.
- As candidates and elected officials, women experience threats and acts of violence from other political actors as well as from within their own parties. In several of the situations examined by this conference, abuse from within a woman's own party was the dominant source of violence.
- In VAWE, there is usually a relationship between the perpetrator and the survivor of violence – frequently a family relationship.
- Threats and acts of violence are significantly more pronounced when directed towards women from ethnic minority communities and those facing discrimination linked to disability, age, sexual orientation, religion, gender reassignment or other factors.
- Police often lack the authority, the ability and/or the desire to respond effectively, even to distinct threats. Women are more likely to report the abuse to someone in their own party rather than a police or security official.
- Quotas, shortlists and reserved seats should continue; they are making a difference for women and for society as a whole. Myths around affirmative action make these measures controversial in some societies, but there is expanding evidence that quotas are advancing qualified and capable women who deliver while in office.
- Because of the dynamics of violence – both on a micro and macro scale – women are talking themselves out of politics every day. A countless number of women are missing from political leadership.
- Despite it all, politics is worth it. The women who contributed to this conference would not have made a different choice if given the chance again.

- Change will come most significantly and most sustainably when there are more women in politics, when these women are able to participate in politics as themselves and not mimic men's behavioural norms, and when these women have power and influence.
- Political will and political leadership can catalyse change. Initiatives from political party leaders, prime ministers and speakers of parliament, for example, can make a difference in a shorter amount of time. As these posts are frequently held by men, this is one of several reasons to selectively pursue the objective of women's political equality in partnership with men.

*Recommendations for political parties:*

- Political parties have a vital role to play in increasing the numbers of women in politics, facilitating their opportunity to exercise influence and authority, and ensuring that politics is a safe space for women.
  - Political parties need to actively mitigate and manage risk for women. This includes clear and enforced codes of conduct and actively pursuing violators, as well as specific support for women that allows them to do the job of politics.
  - Parties should require male leaders and peers to step up on behalf of their women colleagues so that they do not become isolated as figures who are there to be attacked.
- Political parties must develop clear codes of conduct and take action to discipline members who are involved in acts of violence, whether against candidates and officials from other political parties or against their own.
- Political parties must actively and consistently demonstrate that they mean what they say about women's involvement and leadership. This includes grassroots activities like women campaign days and the recruitment and support of women as candidates from the local level. It also includes leading from the top with gender-balanced leadership, cabinets and executive bodies in which women are not always 'deputy' but are very often 'leader.'
- Internal processes are important but so are shared processes between parties to discuss what is going to be tolerated in exchanges among parties. This includes tackling social media.
- Political parties need to moderate the tone of their debate. Language such as 'traitor' or 'enemy' to describe a political opponent, or pledging to 'slap' or 'strike' down the opposing party creates a violent environment that facilitates violent actions.
- Political parties must mitigate the costs of elections for women, either through funding all campaigns centrally or creating special measures through which women can fund their political activities on an equal footing with men. Financial support for the extra costs that women are more likely to face – such as childcare and extra travel expenses – should also be introduced.

*Recommendations for parliaments:*

- Parliaments and other legislative bodies must develop and enforce clear codes of conduct for elected members and senior staff, and must address not only physical and sexualised misconduct but also bullying behaviours.
- Credible, accessible and non-partisan complaints and grievance processes must be available to women in politics, including elected officials, staff, civil servants, civil society organisations (CSOs), and anyone else who interacts with the parliament.
- Parliaments as law-makers have a leading role to play in normalising women's leadership at all levels of decision-making in society. This includes creating minimum standards for women's representation on public and private boards, for example, or codifying misogyny as a hate crime.

#### *Recommendations for the media:*

- Social media platforms must take immediate and genuine action to address the human rights abuses facilitated in their supply chains or they must be regulated to achieve this.
- Cross-party initiatives – rather than individual efforts – are more likely to make a difference in addressing bullying and intimidation from party activists and others, most particularly online.
- Audits of the extent to which women appear in the media – including traditional media – how they are portrayed, and the amount of airtime they get will help build better understanding of why women’s presence and styles of leadership continue to be perceived as anomalous.
- Police services must build better capacity and attitudes around responding to online abuse, threats and intimidation.

#### *Recommendations for elections:*

- While relevant legislation is very important, there are already plenty of good laws on the books. Implementation of these laws is the real issue when it comes to addressing VAWE.
- Basket funds for women’s political participation, training and campaign costs can help, not only with the challenge around elections but also to meet the expectations of voters in some countries to receive ‘goodies’ at campaign events.

#### *Personal recommendations for women in politics:*

- Know when to put down your phone or shut off your computer. Spend time with people who are there to build you up. Women in politics need support.
- Support does not just have to come from family members or party colleagues. There is value in building cross-party networks of support, which can help women navigate political landmines, facilitate collective action and make it easier for women to move into leadership.
- Women should take the lead in shifting political and cultural narratives away from personal appearance and personalities by committing to only referring to other women in politics within the context of their policy proposals and ideas, and never using hate speech or superficial and insulting language about other women in politics.

#### *Considerations for young women:*

- Political parties should treat young women as the ‘now’, not the ‘future’. Role models are particularly important to help young women visualise what they can be and what they can achieve.
- Young women universally reinforced the need for political parties to formalise mentoring systems and opportunities so that young women have help navigating the shock of the political environment and avoiding mistakes that just make politics harder for them.
- Political parties and legislatures must keep quotas, all-women shortlists, reserved seats and other affirmative action measures in place. They are an effective means to get young women into politics. The Co-Chair of Plaid Cymru’s youth wing gave the example of showing up for the first time to a meeting of her local branch’s youth wing and discovering they had a minimum quota for their decision-making body of three people. She ended up being nominated but would have not had the confidence to put herself forward without the quota. Once in the job, she discovered she could do it.
- As with all women, political parties must put risk mitigation, protection and support measures in place. These are especially important for young women and intersectional women who are more severely targeted.

*Structural recommendations:*

- Access to financial and material support is crucial for advancing women's access to politics and political leadership. This includes support for women as candidates as well as for women's rights organisations.
- Women's rights organisations can be pivotal in changing the public debate and issue agenda. Research shows the work of these organisations is the main reason parliaments enact female-friendly legislation.
- Addressing structural inequalities is not about demonising men, but it does mean that existing systems must be challenged and changed. This requires:
  - The use of targeted measures against violence, such as the International Labour Organisation's emerging convention against violence in the workplace.
  - Changing harmful gendered roles for men as well as women, so that all genders can live better and more fulfilled lives.
  - Ending men's dominance of public life so that more women can enter politics, improve policies on key issues, and change the structures and norms that currently over-value and over-accommodate the social and economic needs of men.
- Protections are equally needed for women in civil society as for women in political parties. Civil society is where women frequently begin their political activism, and they can be extremely vulnerable to violent backlash for this activism, particularly in societies where space for CSOs is deliberately closing.



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## Part Two: Session Overviews

### Keynote Speeches

The conference featured four keynote speeches by Liz Saville Roberts MP (Westminster Leader, Plaid Cymru / The Party of Wales); Emma Little-Pengelly MP (Shadow Spokesperson on Equality, Democratic Unionist Party); Dawn Butler MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, Labour Party); and Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom (Leader of the House of Commons, Conservative Party). Links to the video testimonials from the four keynote speeches will be forwarded separate to this submission. In the interim, the opening remarks from Liz Saville Roberts can be found in *Annex 1* of this report, and the closing remarks from the Leader of the House of Commons can be found [here](#).

### Session 1:

#### How Parliaments Prevent and Combat Violence Against Politically Active Women

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| <b>Moderator</b> | <b>Rt Hon Dame Margaret Hodge MP</b> , UK Labour Party, WFD Governor  |
| <b>Speakers</b>  | <p><b>Wafa Bani Mustafa MP</b>, Member, Committees on Public Freedom and Human Rights &amp; Women and Family Affairs, Jordan</p> <p><b>Maria Caulfield MP</b>, Vice Chair for Women, UK Conservative Party</p> <p><b>Victoria Donda MP</b>, President of the Commission on Human Rights, Argentina</p> <p><b>Cheryllyn Dudley MP</b>, Chief Whip of Smaller Political Parties, South Africa</p> <p><b>Ambassador Paddy Torsney</b>, Former Canadian MP and Permanent Observer to the United Nations for the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)</p> |

### Topic Summary

Parliaments must consider the matter of VAWP in at least three distinct ways: as legislators and bodies with responsibility for protecting the rights and well-being of citizens; as physical settings where citizens engage with elected officials; and as places of work.

In this session, panellists were asked to consider the roles and responsibilities of parliaments in addressing violence against politically active women, and the particular dynamics involved depending on the form and source of abuse.

### Session Findings

The overall challenge identified was how to create a new 'new normal' when it comes to how women in politics are treated. To make a difference, this has to be a global effort and not just one or two parliaments acting in isolation.

## 1. Parliaments as legislatures and regulators

- Violence is universally accepted as a normal part of politics, so legislatures have not made this a priority. Consideration of and action on this issue is only beginning now and in a few countries.
- Social media amplifies violence, violent language and bullying behaviours. Several contributors called for a legislated response to the abuse facilitated by social media platforms, citing insufficient action by the social media outlets themselves and noting that standards are frequently already applied to newspapers, television and radio. A consultation by the UK's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport<sup>6</sup> was recently conducted, with action expected in the autumn.
- Regulations of social media companies might include:
  - Ensuring the identify of account holders is verified to prevent or reduce rogue accounts;
  - Prohibiting 'anonymous' accounts; and/or
  - Creating an independent and rigorous complaints investigation framework that makes it easier for women to report violations and expect that something will be done.
- International coordination is necessary to ensure that any legislation affecting social media has an impact, and so that offenders can be identified and face appropriate criminal charges, regardless of their location.
- Contributors discussed whether cultural change leads to legislation or whether legislation leads to the type of cultural change this conference is seeking. It was ultimately decided that both can be true, so the recommendation is to look at both avenues to create change around VAWP.

## 2. Parliaments as places of work

- Most parliaments do not have strong policies or good systems in place for dealing with harassment, nor has this been made a sufficient priority.
- Better codes of conduct, in political parties and parliaments, are needed to protect MPs and political staff, as well as all women working in parliament: civil servants, journalists, corporate and maintenance staff, and CSOs. Women in all of these spheres can be in a vulnerable position without a robust code of conduct and credible enforcement mechanisms.
- Speakers of parliaments have a critical role to play in ensuring action against abusive and bullying behaviours, and those who violate codes of conduct.
- Parliaments must be open and show men and women working on an equal footing, or the brand of their institutions will be damaged.

## 3. Parliaments as political environments

- Once in parliament, women are frequently denied positions of authority or influence, such as committee chairs.
- The role of parliamentary speakers is essential as this type of change is significantly catalysed when there is political will and political leadership.
- Parties also have a critical role to play in enforcing and improving behaviour in parliaments and ensuring that women have equal access to leadership posts within legislatures. Outside of parliaments, parties should ban anyone convicted of violent or offensive behaviour from becoming a candidate.
- In terms of cross-party initiatives, political parties should agree collectively that any members found guilty of violent or abusive behaviour will be thrown out of the party.
- CSOs and the media need to appropriately cover issues of harassment to highlight the issue and also to discourage and stigmatise it.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/internet-safety-strategy-green-paper>

#### 4. Women as parliamentarians

- Overall, more women need to be elected to public office, and there is a need to strengthen professional networks among these women, regardless of party affiliation. Men need to be a part of efforts to get more women elected as well.
- Networking and support are key to strengthening women's leadership. Women have been supporting each other for years informally, but a more concerted effort needs to be made to publicly and privately offer more constructive and meaningful support to women in public life.
- Among contributors, there were differences of opinion on whether women need to take their own physical appearance into consideration. Some suggested that women should be conscious of their appearance and deliberately dress and act more conservatively to avoid the inevitable critiques. Others said that women should dress as they like, and that this is part of normalising women being accepted as they are.

#### ***Personal Stories and Experiences***

Wafa Bani Mustafa had a two-year old son when she first started out in politics and was often made to feel guilty for being in politics and not supporting her family. She reinforced the point that it is possible to be a good human being, mother, wife, sister and so on, and also to be a good politician. When politics began to open up in Jordan in the 1940s and 1950s, women did not generally have education or economic resources. The tribal structure of society meant decision-making was reserved for men, which laid the foundation for political norms going forward. The 1950s election law did not support women, as illiterate women were not given the vote, but illiterate men were. This did not change until 1974 when all women were given the right to vote. It took until 1993 for a woman to be elected; previously, women had only been appointed. A deliberate women's quota was introduced in the 2003 elections.<sup>7</sup> The first women's caucus was established in 2013 with Bani Mustafa as the first coordinator. Women are generally not allowed to be chairs of committees or blocs, except the women's committee. She has many derogatory nicknames in parliament, 'man-eater' being one of them.

Maria Caulfield spoke about violence becoming a growing problem. In the 2010 election, some of her posters were ripped but nothing major. In the 2015 election, this increased slightly. However, the 2017 election was one of the most intimidating experiences she has had, particularly on social media, which has influenced the level of threats. Since 2015, she has been exposed to her car tires being slashed, graffiti, as well as emails and letters of intimidation. The UK Committee on Standards in Public Life conducted an inquiry into the issue<sup>8</sup> and found that women are by far experiencing the most threats, and that the high level was putting off female candidates.

Victoria Donda spoke about the abuse of women during Argentina's 'Dirty War', when 33 percent of the 39,000 people 'disappeared' were women. In dictatorships, women are doubly punished, for being dissidents and for being women. Women had their children taken from them, including those from rape, were physically marked, had their heads shaven, and were meant to be 'recuperated'. She was born in a concentration camp by her mother who was jailed for her involvement in politics. In Argentina, women only made up four percent of parliamentarians until 1996 when a quota law was introduced so that 30 percent of names on the polling list must be women. Due to the feminist movement, there is now an equality law for lists to be 50-50. In parliament, when she was sworn in for the second time, she was called a 'bitch' and shouted at, but no one was punished. She could have covered herself up more, but she chooses to dress how she wants. She believes that women need control and sovereignty over their own bodies now, and the international community should help with that.

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<sup>7</sup> Amendments to Article 11 of the electoral law of 2001 provided a quota provision reserving six of the 110 seats (5.45 percent) for women in the national parliament.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/intimidation-in-public-life-committee-publishes-report>

Cheryllyn Dudley, a MP for 18 years, said that the increased representation of women has disrupted the former order and led to pushback. The proportional representation system in South Africa has played a major role in reducing the potential for campaign violence and intimidation, while the first-past-the-post system would be much worse for women. Political parties play a major role, and there is a limited role of women in higher political party structures, especially in opposition parties. She described a situation whereby she received crude and suggestive comments in parliament and reported the MP for sexual harassment. While the speaker took the matter seriously with a disciplinary hearing, the chief whip of her own party laughed it off and the women in the cross-party committee were suspicious of her motives and grilled her. When the MP's public apology was accompanied by an attempt at justification, the speaker pushed back. The MP did not return in the next session, sending a clear message to parliament and the parties. However, harassment is still there, and psychological violence is most prevalent. The rules may need to continue to be strengthened, which is critical in keeping up with the escalating levels of violence.

Paddy Torsney was the second youngest MP when she entered the Canadian parliament in 1993 and was chair of the women's caucus from 1994 to 1996. The then government brought in a harassment policy during that period, but it was largely forgotten. As a parliamentarian, she was asked if she was 'on her period'. Luckily, she served in parliament before social media and the perceived anonymity of the tool. The IPU stands for representative parliaments globally, however, harassment creates obstacles for women in doing their jobs. Most women asked others to track their emails and social media sites so that they did not need to see the abuse anymore. However, 80 percent of people said they would not be deterred, which is positive news. In 2012, Bolivia passed a law on this issue. Canada adopted a new code of conduct in 2015 that each MP must sign and which has created a complaints process. In 2016, the IPU launched a resolution for parliaments to take action, which the European Union (EU) parliament adopted the same year. The IPU is working with 47 European parliaments to address these issues.

## Session 2: Violence Against Women During Elections

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| <b>Moderator</b> | <b>Tazreen Hussain</b> , Gender Programme Officer, Inclusion Team, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)   |
| <b>Speakers</b>  | <p><b>Hon Dr Nurhayati Ali Assegaf MP</b>, Chairwoman of the Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, Indonesia</p> <p><b>Anne Marie Bhirabake</b>, Vice President, East African Greens Federation, Burundi</p> <p><b>Fatemah Khafegy</b>, Founding Member, Tha'era Network, Egypt</p> <p><b>Hon Juliana Lunguzi MP</b>, Shadow Minister for Health, Malawi</p> <p><b>Cynthia Morrison MP</b>, Ghana</p> |

### **Topic Summary**

VAWE encompasses any act of hostility, brutality or intimidation intended to influence or prevent women's activities around elections, whether this is: campaigning for a party, candidate or political list; registering to vote; freely exercising her right to vote for the political option of her choice; serving as an electoral agent or official; participating as an election observer; raising campaign resources or contributing as a donor; standing as a candidate; and/or working for an electoral campaign.

VAWE was the most frequently cited form of violence experienced by politically active women interviewed for the eight global case studies commissioned for this conference. VAWE is considered separately and distinctly from that of general violence that may occur around elections, as it is targeted at women because of their gender and as a means to undermine their ability to exercise their rights as voters and leaders.

### **Session Findings**

#### **1. Dynamics of VAWE**

- VAWE is a threat to the integrity of the electoral process and can affect women's participation in a variety of stakeholder roles such as voters, candidates, election officials, members of the media, activists, observers, civil society leaders and political party leaders.
- VAWE undermines the free, fair and inclusive democratic process because it prohibits equal participation.
- Throughout the electoral cycle, women are targeted because of their political actions or affiliations, and are otherwise targeted because they are women participating in politics.
- For many women, working as a poll worker, volunteering with a CSO, or voting for the first time is their first foray into political life. Therefore, violence can have an enduring effect on how or whether they participate in the electoral process in the future.
- VAWE is compounded for women who have multiple identities, including women with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBT+ women. Women in rural areas and with lower levels of education can also be more vulnerable.

#### **2. Sources and forms of VAWE**

- VAWE takes many forms, one of which is violence by family members against women exercising their choice. In VAWE, there is usually a relationship between the perpetrator and the survivor of violence.

- Women experience VAWE in both public spaces (such as campaign rallies, protests, in line at polling stations, on social media) and private spaces (within the home). For example, when a female poll worker is intimidated by party supporters to stuff the ballot box, and then when she goes home, her husband threatens her with divorce unless she stuffs the ballot box for the party of his choosing.
- Women experience both physical and psychological forms of violence, in addition to economic forms of violence around elections.

### 3. Women as candidates

- Considering VAWE, there is a strong need for efforts aimed at increasing the number of women candidates and voters. Contributors offered some of the following as suggestions:
  - Women need support and assistance to know how to deal with male domination in communication around elections (and in political environments in general), so that they feel able to speak up and express their ideas without feeling inferior to male colleagues.
  - Parties that do not put forward female candidates should be sanctioned.
  - Women who decide to run for office should develop a long-term vision for who else (what other women) they will bring into politics, and to see other women as part of their networks and not their competition.
- When encouraging women to run and take part in politics, be honest that they will go through hard times and it will be a complicated task, but that they should not be afraid and should respond smartly to disparaging or demeaning remarks.
- Women should not be deterred if they fail the first time and should try running again.

### 4. What measures can be effective in preventing and addressing VAWE

- Collectively, there should be a shift in the language used, including by dropping the descriptive adjectives 'female' or 'woman' before the term politician. Women politicians are politicians first, and characterising them by gender draws unnecessary attention to what is different about them, and implies that the person is a woman first and foremost, which has different (and often damaging) cultural implications.
- While relevant legislation is very important, there are already plenty of good laws on the books. Implementation of these laws is the real issue.
- Political parties have an important role to play in non-democratic regimes in particular. It is the responsibility of political party leadership to promote change, to monitor elections and to have Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)-focused manifestos.
- Addressing the role of social media in facilitating and amplifying violence will make a difference.
- Men need to be encouraged to fight openly for women's rights as partners.
- It is crucial to educate in the home for a more open-minded approach to women's political participation.
- Women's economic empowerment and justice will also make a difference in women's political participation globally.

### ***Personal Stories and Experiences***

Nurhayati Ali Assegaf spoke of the difficulty of running for office without the support of one's own family and that support being the key to success in the fight against VAWP. In Indonesia, women's political representation is now decreasing, and money in politics – particularly the lack of access that women politicians have to financing their campaigns – is partially to blame. Women candidates are not able to fight back for their rights because of pressure from male counterparts and political parties. The low representation of women in regional forums or high positions makes it more difficult for women to see themselves in leadership positions.

Anne Marie Bhirabake spoke about the Burundian culture of women being wives and mothers first and not being seen as public figures nor rarely being in a position of power. Women are considered as private subjects who should remain at home. If they attempt to partake in public or political spaces, women are vilified as trying to 'become men' or to occupy the position of men. In Burundi, there is a 30 percent quota system for female representation in elected positions, whereby out of four candidates, one has to be a woman; with men given preference, women are always in fourth position. While families are supposed to help achieve power, they are actually the first obstacle for women, as they feel the family will be threatened and no one will take care of the children. Women are also scared to be present in politics because their husbands will not support them, and the majority of successful women politicians are divorced. The country does not see many women take part in electoral campaigns, as women are not used to speaking in public; women who do take part in campaigns are often stigmatised. In Burundi, there has been a lot of political competition, and most women who have contested the president's mandate have been killed or are in exile. Physical violence is used against women to force them to stay at home.

Fatemah Khafegy spoke about violence against women voters in Egypt exercised by the state. No female candidate has contested a presidential election; conditions are so difficult for women to win<sup>9</sup>, and they are often subjected to psychological violence and would receive threats if they expressed an interest in running as a candidate. In Egypt, physical violence and intimidation targets women voters who are perceived as unlikely to vote for the 'right' (governing) party, and women waiting outside polling stations are paid to start fights to prevent voting. Economic coercion and punishment are powerful where women tend to be poor or illiterate, and a high number of women voters have a very low income. The government withholds benefits from women who it thinks will not vote for the government candidate and uses 'vote brokers' to buy votes (with the cost of a female vote worth less than that of a male vote). Generally, women are easier to intimidate than men. There is a high level of intimidation towards women voters inside polling stations, with incidences reported by election observers. This includes harassment and abusive language; women being assigned to separate polling stations from men where targeted intimidation is easier<sup>10</sup>; asking women to vote for a candidate or filling out the ballot paper for them if illiterate; and polling stations closing earlier and during prayers to discourage women from voting. Institutional hurdles include women who do not have identification cards not being allowed to vote and not existing in the eyes of the state. Often women are unable to get an identification card because the cost is expensive and the bureaucratic 'red tape' is complicated.

Juliana Lunguzi spoke about party primaries in Malawi and the leadership in political parties being male-dominated and undermining women. Party leaders may tell lies to constituents about female candidates (for example, that they are not standing or rumours of their personal conduct), and word of mouth can be damaging. Uneducated women and unmarried women are especially undermined and discriminated against. In terms of committees, male leadership tries to keep women out of power positions; only two committees in the parliament are chaired by women. Women politicians should not only take part in women caucuses, but should also be in decision-making posts. Tactics for undermining women include by seeing them as sex objects and being treated as such through sexualising, sex shaming and lies.

Cynthia Morrison discussed the power of chieftaincy in Ghana, and although the Queen Mother chooses the chiefs which one would assume would lead to women being strong in the political process, there are no women chiefs. In the parliament, 13.5 percent of MPs are women, and they are subjected to slander against their reputations. Disparaging remarks,

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<sup>9</sup> To run for president, a candidate needs the endorsement of 30 parliamentarians or the endorsement of 25,000 people.

<sup>10</sup> There is a higher level of violence against women not wearing a veil.

such as 'she does not listen' or 'she is rude', begin immediately after an election. Women are not allowed to own land or buy guns, which makes them generally 'less powerful' than men.

### Session 3: The Cost of Politics

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| <b>Moderator</b> | <b>Sandra Pepera</b> , Director for Gender, Women and Democracy, National Democratic Institute (NDI)  |
| <b>Speakers</b>  | <b>Nino Gogvadze MP</b> , First Deputy, Foreign Relations Committee, Georgia<br><b>Rhoda Grant MSP</b> , Parliamentary Business Manager & Women and Equality Spokesperson, Scottish Labour Party<br><b>Caroline Lucas MP</b> , Co-Leader, Green Party of England and Wales<br><b>Tam O’Neil</b> , Senior Gender Advisor, CARE International UK<br><b>Dr Fatou Taqi</b> , President of NGO 50/50, Sierra Leone |

#### **Topic Summary**

While politics is intended to be a form of competition, what is often referred to as the ‘rough and tumble’ of politics and is accepted as ‘normal’ – or simply the cost of doing politics – has different, and often violent, implications for women. These affect women’s willingness to enter the political arena, which in turn impacts the quality of democracy that citizens experience.

While there are localised differences, women in politics globally experience some form of the same dynamics, including: being held to higher standards and/or different criteria; being subjected to abuse and harassment intended to undermine their sense of worth; and being subjected to higher and more consistent threats or acts of violence.

#### **Session Findings**

The overall challenge identified was how to build resilient and sustainable societies, which can only be done with the political empowerment of women, and what it will take to change attitudes and avoid being trapped in a ‘Groundhog Day’ situation with the #MeToo campaign.

#### **1. Dynamics fuelling the higher costs for women to participate in politics and public life**

- VAWP reflects the deep-seated social and political norms of the disempowerment of women. Women have become used to this whereas men have become used to their own privilege.
- One often unspoken aspect of women’s empowerment is that it requires some men to acknowledge that they have progressed through life in part because of privilege and must now stand aside to let more women through.
- In so many countries, women are under-represented in politics and discriminated against economically and in other ways. All societies pay a price when women are not able to fully contribute.
  - If women are not properly represented in positions of power, there will not be change. Women’s political empowerment comes from participation in decision-making.
  - Everyone is worse off when women’s perspective is not included in the issues we decide are important as a society.
- Female politicians who talk about gender issues are often subject to ‘what about-ism’ and questioned on why they are not raising other issues.
- The cost of politics is not just financial but also social and psychological.
  - Entering politics has social costs for women with caring responsibilities and emotional costs from job requirements that are not family-friendly.
  - Violence should not be the cost that women pay for participating in political life.

- The impact of VAWP impacts both those women who are in politics and those who are thinking of entering.
- Politicians are supposed to be 'strong', therefore women are often reluctant to speak out about the violence perpetrated and threatened against them but must do if they are to start tackling it.
- Women are held to higher standards than men in terms of ability, morality, etc.
- Pervasive demands on women for sex in return for political favours is damaging both to the women subjected to those demands and more widely since some assume that any woman in power must have gotten there through favours.
- The experience of women differs depending on the circumstances. For example, the social media mockery of Hillary Clinton might be insulting in the United States, but the same mockery could lead to physical violence in a different society.
- Minority female MPs are especially subject to abuse.
- Women's political empowerment is firmly part of democratic culture. However, it is not possible to get people to organise around things they do not want to.

## 2. Real change comes from systemic reforms

- Globally, patriarchy is a shared theme where there is VAWP. Sometimes this means passive norms but sometimes it is an active tool of unequal power relationships. This requires interventions that address violence against those who are least likely to be heard.
  - Patriarchy is sometimes about tradition and inertia, but it is also crucially about keeping women down, so it is essential to challenge an unequal society and existing power relations.
  - Addressing the patriarchy is not about demonising men, but about challenging and changing the system. Ending structural inequality will be facilitated by the use of targeted measures against violence (e.g. the International Labour Organisation's emerging convention against violence in the workplace), including in parliaments, as well as other measures tailored to the specific environment (e.g. political, cultural and/or legal context).
  - This requires changing harmful gendered roles for men as well as women so that all genders can live better and more fulfilled lives.
- There is a need to end men's dominance of public life so that we can get more women into politics to help improve both the understanding of and policies developed around key issues. This includes changing institutions that have been designed by men, for example, through parental leave and codes of conduct that are fit for purpose.
- For more female participation in politics, there needs to be more understanding about the demands placed on women outside the work place, in terms of child rearing, caring for other family members, etc.

## 3. Interventions and actions to address the cost of politics for women

- Access to financial and material support is crucial for advancing women's access to politics and political leadership. This includes support for women as candidates as well as for women's rights organisations, which can be pivotal in changing the public debate and issue agenda. Research shows the work of these organisations is the main reason parliaments enact female-friendly legislation.
- Basket funds for women's political participation, training and campaign costs can help, not only with the challenge around elections but also to meet the expectations of voters in some countries to receive 'goodies' at campaign events.
- It is important to think about and invest in women in politics beyond national parliaments, such as the sub-national and local levels.
- Networks and other support mechanisms are essential for women in politics. Women need to be able to network like men.

- Mentoring is also crucial for women to counter male-dominated networking. However, women tend to be over-mentored but under-sponsored. Sponsors take on a more proactive and committed role to advance the success of the person they are supporting.
- Proportional representation would help get women and other minorities into parliament. The first-past-the-post electoral system (like Westminster<sup>11</sup>) makes it much harder to break down the barriers since it results in the same people being returned at each election.
- As women hesitate to speak about their challenges publicly, including the violence they face, international organisations and political parties have a role in helping encourage women to speak up.

### ***Personal Stories and Experiences***

Fatou Taqi spoke about her 50/50 NGO trying to change the perception of women in political spaces. In the most recent elections in Sierra Leone, there were only two women presidential candidates out of 17 parties. The question consistently raised was whether women were ready to have women candidates/politicians. Women are subjected to all kinds of insinuations about their sexual morality in particular, and the sexual behaviour of their female family members is sometimes raised. There were also financial costs, including nomination and candidacy fees. Women who have been unable to obtain a mandate from their political party to stand for office, and instead stood as independents, were often physically threatened for contesting against the established parties and even received death threats. There was also extensive name-calling and blackmailing with allegations of sex in exchange for nomination.

Nino Gogvadze said that praise from other women early in her career was critically important. When speaking at a conference on female participation in politics 15 years ago, she was energised, inspired and infused with confidence from the support she received from other women. Georgia is celebrating 100 years of its first democratic republic but still faces challenges, including women's under-representation in decision-making; women being held to a higher standard; navigating candidate selection; financing; and information threats from social media. However, she is optimistic as things that were unlikely 15 years ago now seem possible. With 15 percent of Georgian MPs being women, the parliament voted in March on the introduction of mandatory quotas for female candidates in elections for the national and sub-national assemblies.<sup>12</sup> While considered controversial, she believes quotas help to secure higher representation and to change attitudes about women politicians.

Caroline Lucas spoke about being lucky to have at least some support and a voice that can be heard, which others do not, and certainly was not the case for women politicians 30 years ago. She tabled an Urgent Question in parliament on bullying in parliament, which resulted in a social media storm about her failure to address other issues, as though acting on one meant ignoring the others. Referring to recent sexual harassment/abuse scandals in the UK parliament, she expressed worry on the effects of young women and girls seeing how even women in positions of relative power are treated. She hopes that Westminster procedures on sexual harassment will be strengthened. She is generally sick of the abuse she has received as a woman about her body, clothes, etc.

Rhoda Grant represents one of the largest constituencies in the country (the size of Belgium), which has financial costs for women given the time required to travel for campaigning and for representing the constituents. The Scottish parliament (Holyrood) is also tackling sexual

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<sup>11</sup> In the UK, with just 32 percent of MPs being women at present, it would take another 50 years to reach parity.

<sup>12</sup> Georgia's parliament rejected the bill on mandatory gender quotas in parliament. The bill, put forward by several women's rights groups and signed by 37,000 voters, would have required parties to field an equal number of men and women as candidates.

harassment; a survey showed the same level of abuse as in Westminster. Despite initial boasts about how welcoming Holyrood would be to women Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs), it has been a huge battle to stick to 'family-friendly' hours of work – many male colleagues simply do not understand why this is so important for women. Fifty percent of Labour's MSPs are women but have faced backlash from the media and society, with comments like 'Labour wifeys cannot speak for themselves', etc.

Tam O'Neil shared examples from around the world of violence against female politicians, such as a female politician in Pakistan who was murdered by her husband after he had been taunted at the local mosque, saying he should 'shut her up and control her'. In Pakistan, women cannot compete for one-third of local seats because of local cultural conservatism.

## Session 4: Online Abuse of Politically Active Women<sup>13</sup>

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| <b>Moderator</b> | <b>Chiara Capraro</b> , Programme Manager on Women’s Human Rights, Amnesty International UK  |
| <b>Speakers</b>  | <b>Joanna Cherry QC MP</b> , Shadow Spokesperson on Justice and Home Affairs, Scottish National Party<br><b>Mimoza Kusari-Lila MP</b> , Former Deputy Prime Minister, Kosovo<br><b>Iryna Podolyak MP</b> , Ukraine<br><b>Leanne Wood AM</b> , Leader, Plaid Cymru (The Party of Wales) |

### **Topic Summary**

As the world moves to more frequent online communication, digital platforms are facilitating faster, better conversations and interactions between people, often across great distances. But digital communication, most notably social media networks, are also providing a vehicle for increased and, in some cases relentless, abuse of women and girls. This abuse takes on particularly insidious forms when it is directed at politically active women. Cyber violence featured across the eight case studies conducted for this conference, most prominently in the UK submission. Argentina, Sri Lanka, Ukraine and others pointed to online abuse as a rising concern.

When they are misused, online platforms are most frequently an instrument for psychological violence. This form of abuse is intended to undermine a woman’s sense of self-worth and/or physical safety. It goes beyond disagreeing with, challenging or criticising a woman’s position on or approach to a particular issue. These posts are personalised, sexualised and threatening. Women on the receiving end of the abuse complain that platforms are more likely to provide instructions on how to hide the posts, rather than deal with its presence and its sources. Many of the reforms that have been enacted have been the initiative of these women and their supporters, rather than the networks themselves.

More troubling are indications that, partly because of growing efforts to shut down sources of blatant physical threats, attacks meant to undermine a woman’s legitimacy, credibility and worth are on the increase. These are posts of a bullying nature that involve belittling, name-calling, insults, put-downs, and/or a vitriolic focus on physical appearance. They question women’s very right to be present in politics and their abilities to be leaders in public life. The core intention of online abuse is to get women to stop engaging and to silence their voices and political activism.

### **Session Findings**

#### **1. Patterns and experiences of online abuse**

- The internet may be a new medium, but abuse of women through the media is not a new problem.

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<sup>13</sup> Both Twitter and Facebook were invited to speak on this panel session. While Facebook did not reply, Twitter replied that it was unable to attend but wanted to engage on this issue. The Twitter representative also noted that he observed a distinct shift in the types of posts appearing on the platform around the 2017 UK general election. Blatant threats were fewer in number, but there appeared to be a distinct increase in posts that were more insidious and that questioned women’s legitimate role in politics.

- Women across all political parties are abused online. Addressing this will require understanding what is behind it.
- It remains unclear whether the majority of attacks are individuals acting on their own or as a deliberate response from well-organised groups. This is something the social media companies themselves could easily identify if they wanted to.
- A high proportion of comments involve references to physical appearance, sexuality and personal characteristics. Online abuse includes misogyny, sexualised attacks and doxing<sup>14</sup>.
- New methods are being used by perpetrators to get around the social media companies' community rules or conditions for use, such as image-based abuse.
- As with other forms of abuse raised in this conference, the intersectionality of different factors amplifies the ferocity and size of the abusive response.
- Regardless of the source or the content, the intention of abusive attacks is to silence women's voices.
- Despite the problems, it is important to remember that digital media still provides a good medium for women to get their voices heard. Being online is an asset. There was also recognition that there is no 'offline' for a politician. Immediately after an appearance, there is a digital discussion over everything that occurred.

## 2. Response mechanisms to online abuse

- Recommended responses to online abuse focused on:
  - The roles and responsibilities of social and digital media platforms themselves;
  - The approach political parties should take;
  - Police responses;
  - The need for education; and
  - The need for legislation.
- Recent revelations about Cambridge Analytica prove that there are immensely sophisticated tools out there to better understand online abuse, and that social media companies could respond more effectively if this were a priority for them.
- The *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* should be applied to social media companies. These principles require businesses to identify and address human rights violations in their supply chains.
- It is important to engage with all political parties when it comes to tackling online violence. This includes far-right parties.
- Police require better skills and training to understand online abuse and threats. Too often, the police response is to blame the victim or tell her to brush it off.
- There was recognition that it will not be possible to control everything that is said and posted online. Efforts should focus on education and engaging men on this issue.
- Politicians have a responsibility to speak out on this issue as they have access to forms of protection that others, such as domestic violence victims, trans-gender victims and women activists, do not.

## 3. The response of online platforms

- There was an overwhelming sense that social media companies need to do more about online abuse – that they have the data and the tools they need to respond more effectively to the abuse they are facilitating, but are failing to act.
- Additionally, social media companies are skirting due diligence requirements to identify and address human rights violations within their field of work.
- Freedom of speech is important, but within the law. Freedom of expression is key, but women's access to this right is limited by trolling and online abuse.

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<sup>14</sup> The definition of 'doxing' is to search for and publish private or identifying information about a particular individual on the Internet, typically with malicious intent.

- Online portals that fall outside of social media companies often do not have administrators.

#### 4. What women can/should do

- As with other issues raised in this conference, increasing the numbers of women in political leadership will help advance an adequate response to online abuse. However, the catch is that the pervasiveness of this type of abuse is part of what is keeping women out of politics.
- A network of supportive colleagues is important, and women need better allies.
- Women need to speak out against trolling.
- Women should get organised; some abusive online groups are organised and women need to find ways to undermine them.

#### ***Personal Stories and Experiences***

Chiara Capraro discussed how Amnesty International used a social listening tool to track the women who became MPs in the 2017 UK general election. The research found that black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) MPs were the group who got the most abuse of all, and a huge disproportion for women of colour.<sup>15</sup>

Joanna Cherry supports freedom of expression within the law. She was the second most abused female MP according to the above-referenced Amnesty International study. Attacks were focused on her sexuality, Catholicism, as well as her Scottish and Irish identity, but what underlined everything was misogyny. The fear of the abuse she may receive due to her sexuality prevented her from entering politics when she was younger. With respect to online abuse, she provided an example of her tweeting a video to celebrate World Down Syndrome Day and immediately receiving a barrage of online abuse, including being called 'SNP IRA scum'. She did not feel protected by her party. Twitter and Facebook have also yet to respond to her complaints. She was one of the proponents in creating a report on sexual violence and sex crime in Scotland. Police underwent serious training and looked through historical cases. They also worked with rape crisis centres and women's aid. She believes this could be replicated for online violence.

Mimoza Kusari-Lila highlighted that even women in well-developed countries have not reached equality. The caricature of women in politics is chopped in such a way that a 'new Frankenstein' character is created. When she initially decided to run in Kosovo, she was called 'opportunistic' and 'arrogant'. She lost that election. At that time, Facebook was the main social media platform. In 2010, she was the Deputy Prime Minister and pregnant with her second son. Her main aim was to improve Kosovo's World Bank ranking.<sup>16</sup> She also helped to implement legislation that makes it mandatory to have 40 percent of women on corporate boards. She was described as being 'divisive' and 'ambitious'. There were only three women in parliament and they, unlike their male counterparts, were referred to by their first name. They were also portrayed in cartoon form (for her it was in high heels and with a big belly), and this was shared on Facebook by thousands of people. In 2016, she helped form a new liberal democratic party in Kosovo. In 2017, she was re-elected as a mayor. She thinks it is important to implement actions that engage women. A person can be killed but an idea cannot. She believes women can gain support by empowering women and using statistics in arguments to prove their case; for example, 30 percent more women graduate from higher education in Kosovo but 48 percent of the labour market is male.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://medium.com/@AmnestyInsights/unsocial-media-tracking-twitter-abuse-against-women-mps-fc28aeca498a> or <https://www.newstatesman.com/2017/09/we-tracked-25688-abusive-tweets-sent-women-mps-half-were-directed-diane-abbott>

<sup>16</sup> By the end of her term, Mimoza Kusari-Lila had achieved her aim of improving Kosovo's World Bank ranking to the 64<sup>th</sup> position, by developing progressive reforms around business.

Iryna Podolyak spoke about the political party she is a member of, Samopomich Union (Self Reliance), which was founded in 2012 and was elected to parliament in 2014. While the Ukrainian parliament has 20 percent of MPs who are women, 31 percent of her party is women. In the last three and a half years that the party has been in parliament, it has made substantial reforms. While the parliament has special forums on 'women leaders', senior male politicians in Ukraine often humiliate women and society often reacts. She believes that while some men are arrogant and like to humiliate women, society can and should react.

Leanne Wood spoke about the online abuse she receives, ranging from gender slurs to threats of violence and death. She stated that misogyny intersects with other forms of abuse such as attacks on social class, which she has also experienced. The inference is that she should not be there. There are a lot of critics around, who will attack on how she speaks or her accent, saying she is stupid or thick, and essentially that she does not deserve a voice. She has written a few reports to both Twitter and Facebook with no response. And as she claims, "there should be no tolerance for intolerance".

**Session 5:  
How Women in Party Youth Wings are Affected**

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| <b>Moderator</b> | <b>Alec Shelbrooke MP</b> , Vice Chair (International), Conservative Party  |
| <b>Speakers</b>  | <p><b>Hannah Bardell MP</b>, Shadow Spokesperson on Trade and Investment, Scottish National Party</p> <p><b>Jasmin Beckett</b>, Youth Representative, National Executive Committee, Labour Party</p> <p><b>Aimee Challenor</b>, Equalities Spokesperson, Green Party of England and Wales</p> <p><b>Emmalin Pierre MP</b>, Minister of Youth, Sports &amp; Ecclesiastical Affairs, Grenada</p> <p><b>Sioned Treharne</b>, Co-Chair, Plaid Ifanc (Youth)</p> |

**Topic Summary**

More than ever, the world needs the vitality and renewal that can come from nurturing new leadership in politics. The contributions of young women are essential. Democratic politics is struggling in many countries, even in long-established democracies. Bringing women in – and letting them not only be present in politics but letting them influence how politics functions – is a big part of resetting and revitalising political systems.

Young women, however, face multiple barriers to political participation. The first hurdle often involves discriminatory assumptions about their abilities because of their age. The Ghanaian case study constructed for this conference included several examples in which male candidates attempted to shame younger women opponents for contesting elections or to characterise them as unsuitable for office because of a lack of ‘appropriate’ experience.

Young women also face significant challenges accessing the resources necessary to compete in elections or other forms of political debate. Many of the international and domestic efforts to bring young people into politics are largely focused on reducing violent conflict, which means that, in practice, they prioritise integrating young men’s voices and needs into political decision-making. Finally, the overwhelmingly toxic environment of politics – and in particular the level of abuse directed towards women in politics and the relentless focus on physical appearance – is dissuading younger women from entering public life.

**Session Findings**

**1. Social and digital media can be sources of abuse, but they are also essential communication platforms for young people**

- Social media can be a positive force, but it also channels some of the largest quantities of abuse and attempts at silencing towards women and young women in politics.
- Despite this, social media platforms are integral to the lives of young people and this is not going to change. Young people have been active in lobbying and advocacy to persuade the media platforms themselves to take urgent action, but there has been little positive response so far.
- Legislation and law enforcement need to catch up with the situation, and service providers like Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram need to acknowledge their responsibility and take proper action. Otherwise they risk being complicit to VAWP.
- Political parties can and should provide guidance to youth wing members on how to use social media.

- It was also highlighted that social media is a symptom of a wider cultural problem and hence only focusing on social media diverts attention away from where the roots of the problem lie.

## **2. Young women face particular barriers to entering and practicing politics**

- Politics continues to be seen and understood as a man's world and political spaces are often not safe for women. This has an impact on all women, but the effects on young women can be even more significant.
- Seeing so few women among elected officials reinforces the impression that politics is a hostile place for women, a notion strengthened by the language used to describe women's involvement in politics: 'pulling down barriers' or 'breaking glass ceilings'.
- The normative (combative) political environment, combined with the personalised and relentless abuse directed towards women in politics, creates apprehension and aversion among young women towards entering politics. As a result, an incalculable number of young women are missing from politics.
- In terms of double standards, young women are often seen as inexperienced or inappropriately ambitious whereas young men are frequently characterised as 'go-getters'. Young women find themselves having to explain, defend and prove themselves more than men. Alec Shelbrooke MP gave an example of candidates selected in his area for upcoming local elections. Three 20-year olds were nominated as candidates: two women and one man. The women were immediately subjected to verbal abuse from within the party; the man was not subjected to any of these behaviours.
- Young women from minority and intersectional groups are disproportionately affected by both abuse and higher barriers to political participation. Several panellists recognised this and gave examples of efforts within their parties to address this, including reserved funds to invest in recruitment and support for BAME and LGBT+ members and candidates, dedicated conferences for disabled members, and BAME quotas on decision-making bodies.
- The financial costs of competing for election are one of the main obstacles for young people to enter politics. Gender adds another layer to that obstacle for young women in many countries, as they do not have access to the same fundraising network and different, and often inappropriate, expectations can emerge when a woman asks a man for financial support.

## **3. Political parties have a role and a responsibility in actively supporting young women**

- Political parties have a critical role to play in addressing VAWP specifically and barriers to women's political participation more broadly. Some of these issues, such as online abuse, should be tackled as a cross-party approach.
- Political parties should also take a much more proactive role in addressing some of the norms, beliefs and structures that make politics harder and more hostile for younger women. This can include deliberate recruitment of young women as candidates and executive body members, shortlists and quotas, and the use of positive role models and mentors.
- In their own organisations, political parties should enforce credible and transparent disciplinary procedures for acts of violence, abuse and bullying, and should have specific provisions within their constitutions and statutes mandating this.
- Youth wings of political parties can act as change-agents within their parties with respect to VAWP and gender-based harassment in politics. Options for generating this type of influence depend on the party's internal statutes but include filing motions; organising campaign days, online campaigns and conferences; introducing gender quotas; and establishing caucuses.

### ***Personal Stories and Experiences***

Jasmin Beckett spoke about her personal experience in three areas: online abuse, anti-Semitism and sexual harassment. After being elected to the UK Labour Party's National Executive Committee (NEC), she received reams of abuse online and was subjected to disparaging posts and articles, such as 'Jasmin Beckett, Exposed'. Most of the abuse came from men in her own party. She received threatening emails saying that if she did not vote the right way on a particular issue within the party, there would be 'consequences'. This abuse and bullying started less than a month after UK MP Jo Cox was murdered, making the threats feel particularly acute. Regarding anti-Semitic abuse, she spoke about her friend, Miriam Mirwitch, who was recently elected as Chair of Young Labour. She said that Ms Mirwitch has received abuse that "blows everything I have received out of the water". She also referred to Luciana Berger MP from Liverpool Wavertree, who has had to pursue criminal charges against three people in the last few years for violent anti-Semitic threats. She recommended greater cross-party and popular support for the Reclaim the Internet campaign – akin to Reclaim the Night efforts to improve women's personal safety – to deal with violence and harassment online. Reclaim the Internet is the initiative of Yvette Cooper MP. On the matter of sexual harassment, she spoke of three young women who came forward to say they had experienced sexual harassment within the Labour Party. In her capacity as NEC member, she wrote a letter to party leader Jeremy Corbyn MP calling for an investigation, wholly independent from the party itself. This has been initiated by the party leader.

As a transwoman, Aimee Challenor had a unique and important story to share. As a candidate in the 2017 UK general election, she received numerous tweets attacking her as a transgender woman, but also because of her age (19 at the time). These included tweets calling her a 'delusional child abuse freak' and telling her it would be better if she killed herself. One comment on a YouTube video she posted read, 'There is zero debate needed. Just point and laugh. This c\*\*t needs bullying.' In fact, the night before the conference began, she was with the police giving 'yet another statement' about abusive tweets. She has made the effort to reach out to officials at Twitter and Facebook but has found their responses anaemic at best. She stated that Twitter and Facebook are, in fact, complicit in this abuse as they gain revenue and data from abusive transactions. "Until they take action, they are normalising hate, which fails society and fails democracy," she claims.

Emmalin Pierre described the conference as an eye-opener. She had just been through general elections in Grenada in which women were elected to seven of the 15 seats in parliament and the tenor of the campaign did not match what was described by other contributors to the conference. But, she said it did make her more aware of where and how small incidents of gender-based abuses were occurring – like when her husband, a senior police officer, was transferred to another island during an election campaign, or when her son told her about comments made by teachers and cooks at his school – and the need to respond to these. She was first elected to parliament at the age of 27. She said that after she was elected, listening to some of the comments made in political environments, she started to think "maybe I am in the wrong place". Over the years, she watched as young people put one foot into politics and then stepped right back out because they could not deal with some of the political rhetoric and comments made publicly. She also noted women's vulnerability in terms of fundraising. For a man, she noted, it is very easy to ask for financial support. For a woman, there is a fear, "What am I exposing myself to? What will the consequences be?" She shared that at times, potential donors had tried to become closer in a way that made her uncomfortable. And when she pushed back on this, the possibility of support diminished. She also commented on the ways in which women's political leadership is perceived and remarked upon as 'abnormal'. She had three children while active in frontline politics and very often people found that to be abnormal. In the recent general election, there were four women running in the district where she stood, and they were collectively criticised as if it were inappropriate or strange to have four women running in one area. In her final comments to the conference, she stated that women must be given the opportunity to be who they are while

they are in politics, and not just a female version of a man. If this is not allowed to happen, then it is a form of VAWP.

Sioned Treharne spoke to the value of quotas and shortlists. The first time she attended a meeting of her party's local branch youth wing, she discovered they had a minimum gender quota for their decision-making body of three people. She ended up being nominated for and serving on this body, but said she would not have had the confidence to put herself forward without the quota. Once she was in the job, she discovered she could actually do it and do it well. She also shared a recent conversation with one of the party's elected women, in which it was suggested that creating a Snapchat account would not be wise as she would unavoidably receive sexually inappropriate images in return. This politician, like so many others, had resigned herself to the inevitability of sexual harassment solely because of her gender and role in public office. She also commented on the 'common knowledge' culture within political bodies when it comes to sexual harassment, including a tendency to dismiss concerns, and a reluctance to address rumours and complaints when the individual involved is a senior official or is well-known. When this culture prevails, it is little wonder why women do not put themselves forward for senior positions.

**Session 6:**  
**The Civil Society Perspective on Violence Against Women in Politics**

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| <b>Moderator</b> | <b>Tina Fahm</b> , Commissioner at Independent Commission for Aid Impact & Former WFD Governor   |
| <b>Speakers</b>  | <p><b>Adelina Berisha</b>, Researcher &amp; Advocacy Coordinator, Kosovo Women's Network</p> <p><b>Jo-Ann Downs</b>, Former Member of Provincial Legislature &amp; Chair of the Board of NGO Bobbi Bear, South Africa</p> <p><b>Dorothy Nalubega</b>, President, East African Greens Federation-Women's Network, Uganda</p> <p><b>Gavin Newlands MP</b>, Shadow Spokesperson on Sport, Scottish National Party</p> <p><b>Raquel Vivanco</b>, Leader of NGO Mumalá, Argentina</p> |

**Topic Summary**

Civil society plays a vital role in every political environment. Strong CSOs serve as opinion and thought leaders. Independent CSOs, fuelled by front-line experience and free from the restrictions of rivalry that affect political parties, are often positioned to not only respond to the debate on key policy issues, but to *lead* these discussions and to define what the official response should be.

As such, CSOs have been leaders in the discussion and debate about the global response to VAWP. Domestic and international CSOs have sought to track, measure and define the problem as well as to sculpt and advance specific policy responses. CSOs have also been important advocates and educators around the distinct ways in which VAWP is experienced by women from different communities, particularly women from minority ethnic communities, lesbian and transgender women, and women living with disabilities. However, CSOs are not only linked to the issue of VAWP as activist, research, service and policy machines; women in CSOs are also often recipients of VAWP who warrant consideration and protection.

Civil society is where many women have their 'political apprenticeships'.<sup>17</sup> Community groups, religious organisations, issue-based and advocacy movements, policy forums, trade unions and other CSOs are often the places where women first take a stand on issues that are important to them and begin to take action to create change around these issues. In some situations, women who take a stand on issues through civil society are subjected to the same levels of abuse, harassment and intimidation as women in elected office or political positions.

**Session Findings**

The overall challenge identified was whether civil society is going to be part of the solution or part of the problem, and the importance of civil society noticing when VAWP is taking place, both through behaviour and language.

**1. Role of civil society in shaping the debate around VAWP**

- The support and action of CSOs can change the nature of the public debate and the issues that are seen as priorities. CSO initiatives have changed legislation and forced parliaments to operate in a more transparent and inclusive way, both of which have delivered benefits to women.

<sup>17</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08c7040f0b652dd001322/democratizing\\_democracy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08c7040f0b652dd001322/democratizing_democracy.pdf) (accessed March 2018).

- CSOs are more effective when they work in solidarity to enable change. Examples of successful collective action on the part of civil society include ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the criminalisation of femicide.
- Men have a role to play in civil society action around VAWP. The White Ribbon Campaign is an example of an initiative to raise awareness and change attitudes among men about violence against women. This is an excellent partnership, but overall the movement to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) must be led by women.
- Civil society's role in addressing VAWG and femicide is critical.

## 2. Challenges to the impact of civil society's work on VAWP

- CSOs working on legislative change need to focus equally on implementation as on passage. Change does not come when a law is passed; change comes when a law is implemented. A common example is a nation's constitution, which likely includes explicit references to equality and women's rights. Yet the men who are meant to implement these rights do not believe in equality, and the society still believes that women's place is in the home.
  - Femicide has also been a political debate despite the criminal nature of the action. Even though the act is criminalised, women are still being murdered.
- Women's rights organisations can often be accused of being affiliated to political parties in attempts to delegitimise their calls for change.
- In some countries, like Jamaica, women's groups have been pushed back against as they are being linked to the LGBT+ movement.
- Most significantly, space for civil society is closing in many countries. This is a form of violence that impacts women and requires an urgent response.

## 3. Protections for women in civil society being integrated into policy responses to VAWP

- Civil society is a space in which women can take political action. As such, it is also a space where they can experience violence. Women in civil society require protections from violence as well.
  - Women CSOs can experience violence within their own organisations.
  - Women in civil society are also often acting as individual activists, not as part of an organisation, and they are hugely vulnerable to acts of violence when there is a backlash to their activism.
- Acts of VAWP during election campaigns must be recorded correctly and used to influence policy makers to take action.
- All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) must act to build support among parliamentarians around the world.
- Strategies are required to eliminate sexual abuse in public spaces which can affect women's ability to participate in public life.

### ***Personal Stories and Experiences***

Adelina Berisha spoke of the horrific consequences of the war in Kosovo, whereby 20,000 women were survivors of sexual violence. Only recently have these women begun to get protection. Parliamentarians said that to give any extra support or help to these victims would encourage other women to lie and make false claims. Ministers and other high-level politicians have also held this opinion when asked to support initiatives which would combat violence against women. The opinion that women would lie about suffering violence or abuse has resulted in a significant lack of high-level political support. She highlighted research which showed that 68 percent of women in Kosovo had experienced domestic violence and 65 percent had experienced sexual harassment. Since 2015, activist groups have been organising protests, including a women's march on International Women's Day to coincide with a day of strike action for women to highlight all of the unrecognised work that they do.

The point was raised that this fight has to be against the use of sexist language as well as violence.

Jo-Ann Downs is a CSO activist and politician. She spoke of her experiences working closely with CSOs in a violent province of South Africa, with particularly high levels of violence against women. The support of CSOs enabled her to bring cases to parliament to change laws, including the provision of HIV medication to victims of rape. One of her biggest barriers to overcome was the total lack of support from men in her own political party; she was repeatedly told not to run and that people believed having a woman as a leader was 'just not good enough'. Throughout her time in politics, she exposed corruption and was punished by her male counterparts, who even scheduled a debate to discuss how she was not following the rules. They scheduled another personal debate to yet again discredit her professional actions, on the premise that she was spending too much time working on the Public Accounts Committee and therefore could not do her job properly. She spoke of her determination throughout all of the very personal attacks to appear stronger than any of the men who criticised her, and she promised herself that they would never see her cry. The immense pressure, scrutiny and lack of support impacted heavily on her mental health. The battle to get people within her own party to offer support was often due to the fact that they did not want to acknowledge any failings within the party for fear of bringing it into disrepute.

Dorothy Nalubega spoke of the importance of including CSOs in the fight against VAWP as they are non-partisan. She raised the issue of legislation existing to prevent violence against women and yet not being implemented as men refuse to drive it forward. Despite the Ugandan constitution including women's rights, those rights are not enforced or respected. The former Vice-President of Uganda was a woman, yet if she returned home late her husband would beat her. When she spoke openly about the abuse, both men and women in society and politics said that she had disrespected her husband; she ended up leaving politics. She spoke of the opinion cast on women that if you cannot manage your marriage properly then you would not manage in politics. She raised the need to record incidents of VAWP throughout election campaigns to be used to influence policy makers to take action to prevent the situation from being repeated. Uganda now has laws against gender-based violence, which means that people talk freely about it. She spoke of the need to push for laws and policies to end VAWP so that it is talked about openly and stopped.

Gavin Newlands chairs an APPG for the men's movement to end violence against women, campaigning to end all abuse/gender-based violence and for the UK to ratify the Istanbul Convention. APPGs aim to work cross-party and also with other countries, building support among parliamentarians across the world. He believes men are unaware or wilfully ignorant of the scale of the problem. He himself was not aware of the White Ribbon Campaign until someone pinned a white ribbon on him at a football match. The campaign uses sport to engage with men and raise awareness. He believes more men should be involved and encouraged to join the movement, however, the movement must be led by women. He concluded by saying that men have been silent for too long on this issue, and it is time they became part of the solution.

Raquel Vivanco spoke of the female suffrage movement in Argentina, which saw new legislation passed in 1991 requiring that 30 percent of elected politicians had to be women. Women's suffrage activists are pushing for gender parity in all legislatures. At present, women hold 38 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives and 42 percent in the Senate. In 2017, the Gender Parity Act was approved and from 2019 it will come into effect. However, currently only 20 percent of the country is governed by women and only two of 20 ministries are occupied by women. The media is hugely sexist and plays a key role in VAWP and in wider society. She spoke of Victoria Donda, the Argentine politician and human rights activist who, when entering Congress in a low-cut dress, received sexist insults from other politicians, including them shouting 'bitch' at her from across the chamber. In Argentina, there was one

femicide every 29 hours in 2017, compared to two per week in the UK. There have been calls on the state to introduce public policies that eliminate femicide and violence against women. Although most cases of femicide happen in the home by men who are well-known to the victim, 93 percent of women had experienced sexual abuse in a public space. The state has a responsibility to act to enforce strategies to eliminate sexual abuse in public spaces, as it infringes on women's freedom of movement and ability to participate in public life. The ever-growing feminist movement in Argentina is calling on the government to introduce effective policies to remove sexual discrimination at work and to eliminate the gender pay gap. They are also calling for measures to be taken for men to assume parental responsibilities in order to eliminate the patriarchal system, as well as for 'invisible work' in the home to be recognised for the immense contribution that it is. If these hours of work are not recognised, it is harder for women to participate in politics.

**Session 7:  
The Role and Responsibilities of Political Parties in Tackling Violence  
Against Politically Active Women**

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|------------------|---|
| <b>Moderator</b> | <b>Dr Mona Lena Krook</b> , Rutgers University  |
| <b>Speakers</b>  | <b>Rt Hon Ian Blackford MP</b> , Westminster Leader, Scottish National Party<br><b>Michelle Gildernew MP</b> , Sinn Fein<br><b>Naomi Long MLA</b> , Leader, Alliance Party of Northern Ireland<br><b>Sophie Walker</b> , Leader, Women's Equality Party |

**Topic Summary**

Political parties play an essential role in democracies as bodies that advocate for ideals, values and beliefs; develop policy; lead public debate; galvanise opinion and action; and, facilitate citizen participation in the political process. Political parties, however, can be a cold house for women. In the steady but slow effort to increase women's political participation globally, many parties have resisted the types of structural changes that would create equal access for women. More disturbingly, parties can also be the source of violence against politically active women.

Among the women interviewed for the eight global case studies commissioned for this conference, most described incidents in which violence was perpetrated by supporters of other political parties or movements, but this was not always the case. For some, attacks came from within a woman's own political party.<sup>18</sup> Researchers developing the case studies struggled to identify formal or credible actions taken by political parties to address VAWP. While some parties have developed internal codes of conduct and/or grievance processes, these remain largely voluntary, limiting their reach and impact. Overwhelmingly, political parties have resisted more formalised regulations that would mandate a response to claims of harassment, intimidation, bullying or other forms of violence.

**Session Findings**

**1. Challenges that women face within their parties**

- Parties may lack the space for women to develop leadership opportunities.
- Parties do not adequately moderate the tone of debate, such as the derogatory terms and noises used in the UK House of Commons.
- Policies do not address the structural inequalities against women.
- There is a lack of effective mentoring opportunities to get women to the top.

**2. How parties can support women as candidates and elected representatives**

- Parties must visibly demonstrate what women can achieve in politics, by electing women into positions of party leadership, and through appointment of gender-balanced cabinets when in government.
- It is essential that parties demonstrate zero tolerance for VAWP.
- Through open sourcing policies, parties can come together to improve dialogue and build coalitions to back each other in certain constituencies.
- From within politics, parties can push for institutional changes, such as the establishment of an advisory council on women and girls, gender equality legislation and improved education for girls.

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<sup>18</sup> See the UK case study for an account of a rape threat against a MP from within a closed group on a social media platform.

- Activists can speak, campaign and mobilise to build a liberated and just society.
- Social and psychological support should be offered to women politicians, and men must be willing to step up and speak up in support of women.
- In the SNP, every party member has access to external legal support so that there are no barriers to women getting justice no matter their level in the party.

### 3. Systemic issues

- Women in politics at all levels face psychological and physical violence, threats and coercion from within their own political parties and from opponents.
- Gender inequality across society is particularly manifest in the political sphere.
- Women's contribution to history is frequently airbrushed out.
- There is a continuing debate about whether women are equal, or should be.
- Voters do not always recognise the impact parties' policies have.
- The lack of diversity affects women of colour especially.
- Men must support the advancement of women and normalise women in positions of leadership.
- The importance of feminist leaders, both male and female, needs to be promoted.

### 4. Advice for someone entering politics

- Get out of the online bubble. Social media can either be an echo chamber or place of harassment and threats. Parties can have a direct influence over the use of technologies used for harassment.
- Seek a strong mentor who will help get women to the top.
- You do not have to be a 'strong woman' – it is alright to get upset.
- Be kind, especially to other women.

### 5. Selection of candidates

- Parties must institute affirmative measures to ensure women's participation as candidates. This can include all-women shortlists, quotas and reserved seats. Final selection of candidates should be weighted by whether there are equal numbers of women and men in winnable seats.
- Evidence contradicts some of the prevailing myths about the ineffectiveness or unfairness of affirmative action measures.
- Select candidates all at once to see where the gender discrepancy is, and if necessary, re-open nominations when there are not enough female candidates and ask women to come forward and stand.
- Cultivate women for the entire election cycle – not just during elections – and provide them with external support.
- There should be provisions for equal opportunity and participation, such as through bursaries and childcare for candidates.
- Female candidates have a disproportionately more difficult experience financing their campaigns. This can be addressed through central campaign funding.
- Provide extra training sessions and mentoring programmes for women who want to enter politics.

### ***Personal Stories and Experiences***

Ian Blackford shared that his own entry into politics was inspired by the election of two women, Winnie Ewing MP and Margaret Bain MP. He pointed out the importance of the leadership offered by political parties, both in what they say and what they do and offered the gender-balanced cabinet of Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon as an example. He also shared that in 2017, a woman SNP MP was 'woofed' at from the opposite benches in the UK House of Commons. This type of behaviour, as well as language that refers to 'slamming' or 'slapping' down political opposition must cease as a very first step in eliminating VAWP. He also pointed

out that the political environment in which parties operate must shift in order to facilitate women's leadership. In the Scottish parliament, these types of efforts have included more family-friendly hours and electronic voting. These choices were deliberately made to create an environment in contrast to that of Westminster. Additionally, the Scottish government has established an advisory council that advises on the impact of policy on women and girls. The SNP has also passed legislation regulating gender representation on public boards. In terms of candidate selection, the SNP's executive can direct a local branch to use an all-women shortlist in areas where a sitting MP has decided not to stand again.

Michelle Gildernew and Naomi Long shared particularly compelling personal stories as their political activism has run in parallel with the conflict in Northern Ireland. Michelle Gildernew has struggled with mental health as a result and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder several years ago. Her experience in both politics and the conflict in Northern Ireland has taught her that violence – in whatever form it takes – is used by its perpetrators to exert power. When women are the target, this is doubly true. She noted that she was raised in a society where the lives and contributions of inspirational women, including Constance Markievicz, were erased from history. She pointed out that it is essential that political parties do not wait until an election is called to go look for women candidates, but that as organisations, they develop systems and strategies to support and enable women for years in advance. She also noted that political institutions need to address the issue of working hours – “How anyone is a good parent and a TD [member of the parliament of Ireland] is beyond me.” – and that every role a woman is asked to take by a political party should be remunerated.

Naomi Long was first elected to Belfast City Council at the age of 29. Within a year, she had received her first death threat: “Police came to my door and told me that if I continued to sit on the Council, I would be shot.” She could have stepped away from politics at that point, but decided it was absolutely critical that she did not. Since then, she has received many more death threats – even after the peace agreement was signed. “Even in a post-conflict society, there is still violence and it is often directed at women who have power and influence.” She has also received death threats from both loyalist and republican paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland, had her parliamentary offices firebombed, and had hoax bombs left outside the office. A car containing a policewoman that was parked outside her office was set on fire with the policewoman still inside; she escaped narrowly with her life. She has been physically attacked and assaulted and has received bullets in the post and online threats. The situation got so bad at one point in 2013 that the police were stationed outside her house for two months, she was not allowed to drive herself or go to constituency meetings without police back up, and she was not allowed to confirm in advance her attendance at any event. Regarding social media, she noted that if a male colleague tweets something, they will receive a handful of comments. If she tweets something – even if she is just retweeting a male colleague's post – two days later, she will still be getting abusive replies and comments.

Naomi Long asked, “Why is it that women come to be targets? It is a battle over power.” She offered the following recommendations:

- Political parties need to moderate the tone of their (our) debate. Words like ‘traitor’ or ‘enemy’ set people up as an enemy of the state rather than just a political opponent. This was exactly the kind of language that led to her being targeted, and it has to stop.
- Political parties need to actively mitigate and manage risk for women. This includes training women in practical issues like security, as well as emotional, psychological and everyday support that they need to do the job of politics and to build resilience.
- Parties should require male leaders and peers to step up on behalf of their women colleagues so that they do not become isolated as figures who are there to be attacked. Ian Blackford substantiated this point and noted that political parties will be judged on how well they do this.

- Internal processes are important but so are shared processes between parties to discuss what is going to be tolerated in exchanges among parties. This includes tackling social media.

Sophie Walker offered the perspective of the only wholly feminist party in the UK. She shared the story of trying to file party election expenses with the Electoral Commission around the 2017 general election, and asking officials where they should list the childcare expenses that the party covered for candidates to go canvassing. They received a puzzled response and no clear answer as this appeared to be the first time they had been asked. She noted that, globally, women's equality is a greater indicator of peace than Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or democracy. She referenced previous comments on the value of mentors for women in politics and noted, "Mentoring is brilliant as long as it is the right kind of mentoring. Men get mentors to help them get to the top. Women get mentors to help them overcome the difficulties of being a woman."

In terms of party practices, the issue of financing arose as a key barrier to women's ability to compete in elections.

- The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland does not ask candidates to contribute anything to their campaigns; they fund the election campaign centrally. Once elected, officials make ongoing contributions to the party and the party does its own fundraising centrally as well.
- The SNP funds campaigns through local party branches (constituencies) and some of these resources come from membership dues. They also do not expect candidates to fund their own campaigns.
- The Women's Equality Party also does not expect candidates to fund their campaigns, and additionally offers childcare and bursaries for related expenses.

Mona Lena Krook closed the session by sharing some of the research she conducted on the all-women shortlists used by the UK Labour Party in recent elections. Women elected through these shortlists had, on average, five more years of political experience than other MPs. The MPs who come into politics with the least prior political experience are Conservative Party men, who are also typically the ones criticising women selected through quotas. Additionally, all women shortlists have increased diversity among candidates nominated by the Labour Party. Women elected through these affirmative action measures outperform other MPs in terms of parliamentary questions and match other MPs in terms of other measurements. The ultimate finding of the research was that quotas do not undermine quality, diversity or performance but bring a net gain to the pool of political leadership.

**Session 8:  
Recommendations to Protect Women’s Right to Participate in Politics  
Free from Violence**

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| <b>Moderator</b> | <b>Sue English</b> , WFD Governor and Former BBC Head of Political Programmes, Analysis and Research  |
| <b>Speakers</b>  | <b>Dr Najat Alasttal MP</b> , Palestinian Legislative Assembly<br><b>Emily Cunningham</b> , Staff Representative, UK Working Group on an Independent Complaints and Grievance Policy<br><b>Shamoon Hashmi</b> , Joint Secretary of the National Assembly, Pakistan<br><b>Sarah Olney</b> , Former MP, Liberal Democrats<br><b>Amelia Womack</b> , Deputy Leader, Green Party of England and Wales |

**Topic Summary**

In this final session, the conference focused on recommendations and steps that can be taken to protect women’s right to participate in politics free from violence. Panellists in this session were invited to address any of the topics covered during the event or any additional theme related to VAWP, but remarks were concentrated on concrete responses to address the complex challenges associated with VAWP.

**Session Findings**

**1. Change starts with awareness**

- Awareness should start with privilege, unconscious bias and the lack of empathy in contemporary politics. Being aware of these dynamics requires deliberate work as well as investment in organisational structures to identify and address them.
- Awareness is also connected to noticing how and where politically active women can support other politically active women in ways that are constructive and amplify the value and the impact of their work.
- Women should take the lead on shifting the political and cultural narratives away from personal appearance and personalities by committing to only referring to other women in politics within the context of their policy proposals and ideas, and never using hate speech or superficial language about other women in politics.

**2. Real change will require investment in how societies perceive and understand gender, equality and politics**

- In contrast to recent decades, laws today are less likely to contain gender bias and discrimination. The real problem is social attitudes. To genuinely address VAWP, efforts must look beyond the sources of the abuse to the causes that are creating them. This is not yet happening at a meaningful level.
- The development and rollout of civic and political education could be a good starting point for cultural shifts.
- It will also be useful to support greater understanding of equality and inequalities among elected women, particularly those who do not come to the role as issue specialists or who have been put forward by a party that does not make equality a priority.
- Important questions remain about how we are raising men and boys and how toxic masculinity and male identity crises are fuelling some of these behaviours.

### 3. The boring stuff – day-to-day processes and procedures and clear, enforceable rules make a real difference

- Parties and other political institutions should look at the day-to-day mechanisms they have in place. If these are sound, progress will follow. Examples include clear reporting processes; internal standards by which a person cannot move into a position of power or leadership unless they have completed fundamental trainings (like unconscious bias); and systems planning for leaders (e.g., what they will do in cases of harassment, intimidation or discrimination).
- Unconscious bias is one of the reasons a more honest exploration of what is going on with the media needs to be pursued.
- Reporting processes are important. When an incident or offense is reported, this makes it clear that there is an expectation that something should be done.
- A recommendation was put forward to make misogyny a hate crime so even micro-aggressions can be reported.
- There was also recognition that reporting is dangerous for some women in some situations.

### 4. The conversation needs to expand

- Men need to be included in these conversations as well, as do the police, judiciary, survivors, CSOs, academics and lawmakers, so that it is not just political parties talking to themselves to come up with standards for behaviour in politics.

### ***Personal Stories and Experiences***

Emily Cunningham shared what she has learned as a member of the UK Working Group on an Independent Complaints and Grievance Policy<sup>19</sup>, convened by Andrea Leadsom MP, the Leader of the House of Commons. She noted that women in politics face a broad range of violent interactions. These span from micro-aggressions (comments about appearance or weight, or whether they have children), general workplace harassment (which can be suggestive or involve physical assault), online violence, as well as physical violence and attacks. She suggested that long-term change will require the following:

- People in positions of power and privilege need to accept their privilege and use it to help others. This means that men need to call out the bad behaviour of other men, and also to step back to allow the voices of women to be heard, especially in the political realm.
- Women need to be sure we are actively lifting up other women. This does not mean endorsing the thoughts or ideas of every woman simply by virtue of her gender, but it does mean that women need to be doubly supportive of positive and constructive efforts made by female peers to make sure these are heard and acknowledged.
  - She offered the example of women who worked for former US President Barack Obama using ‘amplification’, whereby they would repeat ideas suggested by other women to make sure they were heard and also to ensure that the name of the owner/originator of the idea was attached to it so she was given due credit.
- Finally, as societies we need to address toxic masculinity. Threats against women in politics – especially on social media – tend to be highly sexualised. This comes in part from an expanding male identity crisis in reaction to women feeling empowered to express more identities. This expansion by women may be interpreted by some men to be an infringement on their identities.

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<sup>19</sup> The Working Group’s report can be found at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-02-08/HCWS460/>

She also suggested that dealing with issues of male identity will in time permeate our social interactions, and ultimately change the norm. To facilitate more constructive engagements on these complex issues, she suggested that three ideas should be part of our approach:

1. *Empathy*. There is a lack of empathy in modern politics. Seeing our own privilege and seeing when other people do not have it will help us know when and how to lift other people up.
2. *Responsibility*. We all need to play an active role in political change. She referenced the American political activist, Angela Davis, in this regard: "In a racist society it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist." In this context, men need to play a pivotal role in calling out other men.
3. *Humility*. It needs to be okay in politics to admit when we are wrong and to apologise so that we can have healthy conversations about these complex issues.

Amelia Womack began her remarks by referencing a recent television programme on the suffragettes in the UK, which included a profile on Emily Wilding Davidson who died in 1913 after being trampled by King George V's horse. On her deathbed, she received letters willing her to die and calling her disgraceful and an abomination as a woman and a British person. Watching the programme with her, her mother remarked, "Look, your social [media] abuse has been common throughout one hundred years of feminist history!" In terms of social media, she regularly receives a meme that has the appearance of the title from the Back to the Future films, but instead it says 'Back to the Kitchen'. This is posted in response to whenever she speaks out on feminist issues. She also gets a lot of comments focused on the fact that she does not have children, stating that she must be 'barren' or something else must be wrong with her. She shared that the most difficult abuse she has endured involved an 11-year-old family member. After quoting on Twitter something that this child said, she received 20,000 abusive tweets in response. The UK political magazine *The New Statesman* did an analysis of these and found that just two of the tweets were from women. She suggested that to really address the phenomenon, efforts need to look beyond the sources of the abuse to its causes. She expressed disappointment in the recent report of the UK Committee on Standards in Public Life's [report on intimidation in public life](#), which focused more on social media platforms as facilitators of abuse instead of drilling down to the more structural and societal issues that are feeding the problem. She also noted that the press have a lot to answer for and there should be greater scrutiny not just of how many women are on panels on television, but how much air time they get in comparison to men and how they are portrayed during that time. As an example, she shared a recent experience in which a national television outlet decided to cover a campaign around the centenary of suffrage for some women in the UK on which she had been working. The broadcaster ended up interviewing a male MP instead of her. They did not want her because she was considered too politically junior, and they would not move their cameras to accommodate co-campaigner Baroness Sal Brinton who is in a wheelchair. Thus, women's voices were not heard on an issue involving women's suffrage. Finally, she shared that she is working on a cross-party initiative to make misogyny a hate crime.<sup>20</sup>

Sarah Olney was considering whether to put herself forward as a candidate for a parliamentary bi-election in 2016 when UK MP Jo Cox was murdered. This strengthened her resolve. Her biggest learning curve was realising that this is all about power. All of the aggression that women face in politics is about those who currently have power not wanting to cede power to new groups who have not previously held power. In her experience, those who are born into power are most aggressive when challenged or asked to give ground. Her message is that power has to be taken because it is not going to be given, and that the clear rules of electoral engagement facilitate this. In so many other parts of life, there are multiple ways that men can

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<sup>20</sup> Misogyny is already a hate crime in the UK regions of Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire. The legislation in these areas provides social media platforms with a tool and the backing to be more proactive in enforcing community rules.

challenge women's right to take power. She gave the example of the gender pay gap and the recent revelation that John McEnroe makes ten times more money than Martina Navratilova to report on the Wimbledon tennis competition. After this was exposed, there were multiple pieces in the press justifying why this makes sense. The reasons were linked to behaviour, choices or experience, "Somehow it is our fault as women." However, the rules about how power is to be transferred in democratic systems are clear: it is a simple vote count. If a woman has more votes than her male opponent, there are no excuses for him to withhold power. She noted that real life interaction with constituents is what makes politics rewarding. She recommended that women officials keep in-person meetings as their main form of communication, rather than spending time scrolling through pages of abuse on social media. Her closing request was the women in politics pledge never to use another women's gender against her or engage in hate speech, so that women can begin the culture of challenging others in politics around policies and not personality or personal appearance.

Najat Alastal is a medical doctor specialising in family planning and is also the head of the Red Crescent Society in Palestine, so even before entering politics, she had 20 years of experience with and understanding of the problems that women face in terms of violence. She has witnessed the effects of sexual, physical, economic and psychological abuse within homes and families, but the conservative nature of Palestinian society means that these issues are not spoken about and women suffer in silence. Violence and culture have become mixed in Palestine as a result of political history and the current conflict and occupation. It has not served anyone well. She raised the case of Khalida Jarrar, a Palestinian MP who is under administrative detention without charge in an Israeli prison. She is an activist who has fought for human rights, women's rights and prisoners' rights in both Palestine and Israel, and she is currently detained for that activism. Globally, women MPs suffer for speaking out. While the existing Palestinian national strategy to address violence against women includes political violence, much more must be done towards implementation. Leadership from the political parties in particular is important.

Shamoon Hashmi noted that he comes from Pakistan, the country of Benazir Bhutto and Malala Yousafzai. Both leaders, and both subjected to torture. He shared the story of his nine-year old son who, at the age of three, favoured playing with girls over boys. As he grew up, he received social messages that girls were not friends and equals but objects to be loved if they comply, or broken if they do not. He pointed to the importance of paying attention to language – "Why are there only witch hunts and no bogeyman hunts?" – and to what is happening in schools, so that we target societies as a whole and not just political parties. He raised the issue of how women parliamentarians are often treated by women from civil society in developing environments. Women civil society leaders are often issue specialists who have more policy expertise and understanding than women MPs. He stated that women civil society leaders tend to harass and bully women MPs instead of supporting them and understanding the political space in which they have to operate. He pointed out that from his research, women MPs in the developing world are neither gender experts nor are they gender sensitised – and neither are the parties that nominate them. Stigmas, political backlash and the sense that other matters are more urgent prevent them from talking about equality issues with any real urgency or sense of priority.



## Annex I: Opening Remarks by Liz Saville Roberts MP

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

It is a real pleasure for me to be here today to welcome you all to this unique and unprecedented international summit.

It really fills me with pride and hope to see the room so full, and with people from so many different parts of the world and from all aspects of political life.

Those of you who are based in the UK will know how rare it is for us to have every single party represented in the House of Commons, in this room today, and even rarer for us all to be signed up to the same cause – to put an end to violence against women in politics.

What makes this conference truly unique however, is that we are joined by delegates from 20 different countries around the world – from legislators to police officers, campaigners and civic society representatives.

We no doubt have a very interesting, and hopefully very constructive two days ahead of us.

I must begin my remarks by expressing my heartfelt thanks to all those who have made this unique and unprecedented project happen.

What began as an ambitious, but by its own nature, a very modest project between Plaid Cymru and Argentina – with our friends and colleagues from Buenos Aires, who are here in the audience this morning - has grown and evolved into an international collaboration of major significance, and the substance and breadth of the agenda over these two days reflects how far the project has come.

That is largely thanks to the outstanding work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's Multi-Party Office.

I still don't quite understand how such a small team has got us to this stage but it certainly has a lot to do with the commitment and hard-work of their outstanding team of staff.

It is also deeply indebted to all the political parties for being so eager to grow this project with us and for providing the funding and resources to make it possible.

This summit, and the research behind the report we're launching today simply would not have been completed were it not for the assistance of every single party in the House of Commons.

Neither would it have happened without the support of our respective international partners, who have travelled, in some cases for thousands of miles, to be here at this event today.

What began as a small group of people, hoping to share ideas on tackling violence against women in Wales and in Buenos Aires, has become an international, global network of politicians and parties, governments and parliaments, public services and civil society - all

working together to eradicate what is of course, a global goal – to put an end to violence against women in politics.

This year we, in the UK, celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first time when any woman was allowed to vote in our elections.

This happened as a result of years of campaigning by indomitable, courageous women.

They rejected, fought against and ultimately overturned their society's assumption that half of humanity lacked the physical, intellectual and moral strength to engage in politics.

The women who fought back against those attitudes were ridiculed and physically attacked for daring to suggest that their opinions on matters of significance were equal to those of men.

The fight for the right to vote was won a hundred years ago, but the societal attitudes, the gender conditioning and the abuse that surrounded the campaign for women's suffrage are still with us in the 21st century.

What happened historically to women is writ large in the political sphere today across all parts of the world.

Two years ago, the English MP, Jo Cox was murdered in her constituency just as she was about to hold a surgery in her office – doing her job – the job she had been elected to do – a job that she loved – and the same job that many of us in this room do every day, of helping our constituents.

This tragic loss drew belated public attention to the problem of violence against women in UK politics, in the most devastating way possible.

While that incident was a new extreme, threats of violence; insults based on appearance, weight or race; belittling comments based on gender stereotypes; and references to a woman's sexual attractiveness... are anything but rare.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 44% of female parliamentarians who responded to an international survey covering 39 different countries, reported having received threats of death, rape, assault, or abduction.

One fifth said they had been subjected to sexual violence.

Violence against women is by no means restricted by national borders – it is evident across all parts of the world.

The report we are launching at this conference will leave you in no doubt about that.

The case studies from eight different countries that this report brings together are harrowing, but they also offer us realistic, tangible and feasible recommendations on how we can make such abuse a matter of history.

Despite gains in women's political activity, women remain significantly under-represented in politics worldwide.

Today, just 23% of parliamentarians worldwide are women.

Out of the 195 countries in the world today, only 16 of them had women as their Heads of State in 2017.

Can we really say, with any real conviction, that democracy exists, when half of the population is not wholly and equally engaged in decision making?

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As women's political activity has grown, so has the frequency and degree of violent responses to their presence in politics.

Globally, politically-active women – voters, candidates, local councillors, members of parliament, community activists – regularly find themselves on the receiving end of acts or threats of violence.

And of course, as violence and abuse increases, so do the barriers that have prevented women from participating in the first place.

It is not difficult to understand why women choose not to participate in politics when they see that the consequence is abuse.

There is no denying that over the past decade, the increase in women's political representation has been accompanied by a rise in violence against women in politics.

That violence encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation against women as political actors simply because they are women.

These acts – whether directed at women as civil society leaders, voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives or appointed officials – are designed to restrict the political participation of women as a group.

This violence reinforces damaging stereotypes and roles given to women, using domination and control to exclude women from politics.

It is the same abuse - the same violence and the same attitudes that we saw in the UK a hundred years ago, in the fight for women's suffrage.

What this means for women in politics today, is that, in addition to facing the same challenges their male colleagues face in terms of fulfilling their electoral responsibilities, female politicians often must also confront resistance and dangers, even in the physical spaces that should be accessible and safe for them - political assemblies, party meetings, their offices, and their homes.

When we discuss violence against women in the context of politics, we often think of the digital sphere and the prevalence of online abuse.

Social Media has undeniably revolutionised the way in which politicians interact with their constituents.

Facebook and Twitter, at their best, engender frank political debate, and remove the barrier of distance.

But some of the very aspects of social media which are designed to bring the world closer together, bring about abuse.

Both distance and the option of anonymity mean that some individuals feel emboldened to abuse.

One of the case studies in our report reveals that entire websites exist with the sole purpose of telling its members which politician or public figure to target at any given time.

But one of the most unpalatable aspects of violence against women in politics is how “normal” it has become for them to receive rape threats.

One parliamentarian told our researcher: *“it just happens; it happens to everyone.”*

A number of the case studies draw attention to the fact that, not only members of the public, but professional commentators and journalists feel entitled to comment on how women look.

An elected politician told one of our researchers: *“I get comments calling me an ugly bint, saying I deserve a good raping”.*

Rape threats and comments about a person’s looks are overwhelmingly aspects of abuse perpetrated against women in public life, not men.

Whilst male politicians undoubtedly face violence of other forms, including death threats, the abuse they face is not perpetrated against them simply on account of their gender.

That difference is fundamental.

Psychologists observe that threatening to rape a woman is seldom about sexual desire, and more about power.

This can hardly lessen the psychological trauma of receiving threats of this chilling nature on a sometimes daily basis.

And the psychological abuse that women face in political life, is often less noticed, and certainly less discussed than online abuse.

Psychological violence involves verbal and emotional abuse and acts intended to undermine a person’s sense of worth or authority.

Acts such as belittling a person’s abilities and competency, name-calling, put-downs, constant criticism, or a repeated focus on physical appearance, undermining the intellectual ability of the victim.

In fact, some of our case studies argue that psychological abuse is the most common, and most damaging form of abuse.

In Argentina for example, many women find that their opinions and contributions to debates are ignored and disregarded...

...That they are given less time to speak than their male colleagues...

...And that, while their male colleagues will be scrutinised on the content of their contributions, women will be personally attacked and undermined, with imagery of women as wife, mother and housewife, to discredit their authority in making an argument, and to undermine their very purpose as political figures.

The report does not make for easy reading.

In addition to online abuse and psychological abuse, it cites physical violence, including murder, kidnapping and beatings... and even domestic abuse, intended to prevent or undermine their political participation.

The Sri Lanka case study cites one of the most extreme cases of physical violence, in which a bomb attack took place at the campaign rally of the country's sole female president in 1999.

The report also raises sexual violence, including sexual acts by coercion or force, as well as unwanted sexual comments or innuendo, and harassment.

It includes attempts to force women into sexual acts in exchange for a political outcome, such as securing a nomination, funding or an electoral result.

It is worth repeating that, one of the most unpalatable aspects of this is how normalised it has become.

These cases I have raised – sexual, physical, economic and psychological abuse – are normal.

That is why we are here today – to make sure that that statement becomes as chilling to everyone out there as it is to us.

Having delegates from so many organisations and from so many different parts of the world here for the next two days, focussed on our shared goal, of putting an end to violence against women in politics, gives us an opportunity like never before, to make significant steps forward.

We have two days' worth of valuable discussions ahead of us beginning in a few moments, with a discussion on how parliaments prevent and combat violence against politically active women.

Over the course of the two days we will cover topics including the cost of politics, elections, online abuse, the impact on young women and many others.

The opportunity to share experiences will be valuable to all of us, but as one of the few gatherings of this kind, emerging from political parties themselves, it is vital that the conference also provides meaningful direction on what should happen next.

Our goal is to come up with specific recommendations from each session.

We will have rapporteurs in the audience throughout each session, taking notes about what is discussed and what recommendations are made and at the final session tomorrow, we will focus on harvesting the recommendations that have emerged from each of the sessions, as well as proposing new ideas that have not yet been considered, so that the conference can produce specific actions that can be taken to protect women's right to participate in politics, free from violence.

I should also say that each session will have a timekeeper, seated in the front row of the audience to keep us all in check, including me!

So to conclude my remarks this morning...

It is up to us to remould society and bring about the reality of equality.

We cannot simply expect deep-rooted power imbalances to crumble and fall at the utterance of worthy but empty rhetoric, to submit to well-intentioned but unenforced laws.

It is up to us as politicians, our respective parties, our institutions, the police, legislatures, media and civic society as a whole to challenge abusive behaviour and to tackle the issue at its root.

In some cases it will involve legislating, in others it will involve implementing existing legislation - and securing the budget to do this effectively.

But in all cases, it will involve culture change.

Such change must challenge objectification of women as mere biological objects whose value is assessed on their physical appearance and sexual currency.

It must call out and condemn the casual use of aggression and threat of physical violence to silence women's voices in the digital arena.

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The youth of today are the parliamentarians of tomorrow.

Young women and young girls should aspire to participate in politics, to lead and to govern their countries.

It is up to us to make their path a safer, simpler and more attractive path for them that is has been, and it continues to be, for us.

It is up to us to show the next generation that they have a right to be politically active – that their opinions on matters of significance are valuable.

It is up to us to set an example for the next generation.

A hundred years ago, our predecessors gave us the right to participate in the democratic process.

We must now show that we are worthy of their legacy, and ensure that women not only participate in elections, but take up their full role as leaders, law-makers, and power-brokers in our respective countries as equals – with respect and authority, and free from abuse.

I hope you enjoy the conference, and I look forward to working together with all of you throughout the two days ahead of us.

Diolch yn fawr iawn. Thank you very much.