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Introduction – Theresa May, Minister for Women & Equality



I am delighted to introduce the first newsletter from the Government Equalities Office (GEO) which provides an update on the work this Government is doing to tackle gender inequality.

On 2 December 2010, the GEO published the Government's 'Equality Strategy' which sets out our new approach on equality. This is built on two principles – equal treatment and equal opportunity. This means building a society where no-one is held back because of who they are, or where they come from. Our new approach is not built on bureaucracy but aimed at changing culture and attitudes and tackling the causes of inequality. Of course, we recognise that people can face discrimination because of who they are and disadvantage because of where they're from. And we will still need specific action to deal with specific problems. That's why despite having to get to grips with the record public deficit we are lifting nearly one million of the lowest paid workers out of income tax and protecting the lowest paid public sector workers from the public sector pay freeze, the majority of whom are women; we are increasing child tax credits for the poorest families and supporting the education of disadvantaged children through the pupil premium. We are also tackling the barriers women face getting into decision making positions by setting an aspirational target that 50% of all appointments to public boards will be women by 2015 and we have established the Lord Davies review into the lack of women in our top companies.

In developing and delivering this new agenda, we want to move away from a tick box approach to equality so it is important to us to hear directly from you on what you think matters, what you think the priorities are and what information you would find useful and how you want to receive it - I look forward to hearing your ideas.

Please do let us know what you think of this first issue and what you would like to see in future issues.

## Engaging and Listening to Women

The Women's National Commission quango closed on 31 December 2010. Government is committed to continue and enhance its engagement with women across the UK and we are considering how best to ensure direct Ministerial engagement with women and women's organisations.

GEO has had informal consultations and discussions with partners on how we can best make this happen and we would like to thank everyone who participated and shared their views.

We have a new email address if you wish to contact us for information or to receive these regular newsletters. If you wish to be on the mailing list for updates and engage with the new model or any ideas for future newsletters please email:

womensengagement@geo.gsi.gov.uk

We have also developed a dedicated webpage so we can listen to women's views, while a new way of reaching out to women and listening to their views is being developed:

[http://www.equalities.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/womens\\_engagement.aspx](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/what_we_do/womens_engagement.aspx)

## International Activities

### UN Commission on the Status of Women

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is held annually at United Nations headquarters in New York in late February – early March. The objective of the Commission is to promote implementation of the principle that men and women shall have equal rights.

The 55<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW will be held from **22 February - 4 March 2011**. The thematic focuses of CSW 55 will be:

Main theme: *“Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work”*; and,

Review theme: *“The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child”*.

Our Ministers are committed to continuing the strong and productive relationship with UK non-Governmental organizations (NGOs). The upcoming 55th session in New York provides a timely opportunity to set in motion our plans which also includes revitalising communications on international matters. To engage UK NGOs on the themes of the session and outline the provisional arrangements, GEO organised and

chaired a pre-CSW briefing meeting in January. We were joined on the panel by policy experts from across Government Departments with policy responsibility for the priority and review themes.

UK NGOs can keep abreast of UN developments and the UK's participation at CSW via regular GEO Women's Engagement e-bulletins and online shortly.

More information on CSW, is available on the UN Women **website**. Information on NGO participation at the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW is available **here**.

## **UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**

The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a United Nations Human Rights convention which the UK signed up to in 1981 and ratified in April 1986. By signing up and ratifying CEDAW, States agree to implement the measures set out within it by legislative and other means. States submit "periodic" reports every four years to the CEDAW Committee, the expert body that monitors implementation of CEDAW.

The GEO is on course to submit the UK's 7th periodic report to the UN in May 2011, with the examination expected in 2012. These reports provide progress information on the situation of women in all the areas of discrimination detailed within the Convention, as well as the UN CEDAW Committee's previous recommendations.

UK NGOs are very active in monitoring progress against the Convention and the implementation of the Committee's recommendations and therefore direct engagement with NGOs is crucial to the process. So in November 2010, the Ministers for Women & Equality hosted a large consultation event to discuss priorities for the UK both domestically and internationally. To ensure engagement is UK-wide, GEO has also supported similar events in partnership with the Devolved Nations (Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales). For more information on CEDAW click the following links:

[http://www.equalities.gov.uk/international/united\\_nations.aspx](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/international/united_nations.aspx)

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

## **News from across Government**

### **Funding for rape crisis centres**

The Ministry of Justice has announced the Rape Support Fund. As part of the Government's commitment to improve funding to existing rape crisis centres and to establish new centres where there are gaps in provision, the Rape Support Fund will provide up to £3.5 million in funding annually to existing rape crisis centres. Each funded centre will receive a three-year funding agreement, giving them the financial certainty they need to develop a sustainable presence and to prepare for the move to local commissioning.

The Rape Support Fund is part of a wider package of grant funding of up to £9.8 million per year, for three years, for voluntary-sector groups providing support to many of the most serious, most vulnerable and persistently targeted victims and witnesses of crime. Further information may be found on the Ministry of Justice website (<http://www.justice.gov.uk/>).

An announcement on new rape crisis centres will be made later in the year.

### **Public consultation – Breaking the Cycle Green Paper**

On 7 December, Ken Clark, the Justice Secretary, announced the publication of a Green Paper, ***Breaking the Cycle: effective punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders.***

This **Ministry of Justice** Green Paper sets out proposals to break the destructive cycle of crime and protect the public, by more effectively punishing and rehabilitating offenders and reforming the sentencing framework. Included in the paper are proposals in relation to women offenders with a specific question about what needs to be different for women. The Green Paper can be found on the Ministry of Justice website at the following link accompanied by an impact assessment, an equality impact screen, and an evidence report:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/breaking-cycle-071210.htm>.

The Green Paper is open to public consultation until **4 March 2011** and the Ministry of Justice welcomes contributions from individuals and organisations with an interest in this important area of policy. Responses can be submitted by email to [breakingthecycle@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:breakingthecycle@justice.gsi.gov.uk); via the website; or by post to Breaking the Cycle, Ministry of Justice, 10.08, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor, 102 Petty France, London, SW1H 9AJ.

### **Parenting speech**

On 17 January, the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg gave a speech to the independent think tank Demos on parenting, in which he set out the Coalition Government's position on parenting, and ideas on reforming parental leave.

<http://www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/parenting-speech>

### **Violence Against Women & Girls newsletter**

The **Home Office** produces a regular violence against women and girls newsletter, for the most recent, please click **here** to view.

## Other useful links

The Equality Act 2010 provides a new cross-cutting legislative framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all; to update, simplify and strengthen the previous legislation; and to deliver a simple, modern and accessible framework of discrimination law which protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society. Click **here** to find out more.

The ambition of this government is to end violence against women and girls. You can read our strategic vision, published on 25 November 2010, and find out what work we're planning over the coming spending review period to address the issues. Click **here** to find out more.

[http://www.equalities.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/womens\\_engagement.aspxwomensengagement@geo.gsi.gov.uk](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/what_we_do/womens_engagement.aspxwomensengagement@geo.gsi.gov.uk)