



MSP's URGED TO KEEP WOMEN ON THE AGENDA

Engender hosted an event in the parliament last night (21/11/07) inviting MSPs to Keep Women on the Agenda. The audience heard from Engenders Executive Director, Niki Kandirikirira, Convenor Marsha Scott and speakers from other women's organizations that gender equality must not be side-lined as the different equality strands are brought together in the form of the new Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Engender commissioned summaries of the 10 themes¹ covered in the Scottish Government's Gender Audit of Statistics² published this year. The summaries, compiled by Suzi MacPherson³, present the statistics relating to the position of women and men in Scotland followed by points for discussion and have been sent to the cabinet secretaries with the remit for each theme.

The Gender Audit found that women's average hourly pay for full time work was 88% of male workers⁴ and that when looking at all sources of income, women's individual income was 60% that of men's.⁵ It is this continuing economic disparity between the sexes that the recent Gender Duty is intended to address by putting a statutory obligation on public bodies to show that they are paying male and female employees fairly. But legislation is only half the story when the 3 main causes of the gender pay gap⁶ – occupational segregation, difficulty combining work and caring responsibilities and employment discrimination – all remain.

Niki Kandirikirira, Engender Executive Director said,

“Despite the accepted need for a Gender Equality Duty, it still seems fundamentally hard for people to acknowledge that the reason we need one is because of the persistence of women's inequality.

Increasingly, we are told that working on a so-called 'women only' agenda is no longer a policy or funding priority; that the focus now is on gender equality – men and women. But I can't help noticing that while it would rightly be deemed inappropriate to challenge action against discrimination against BME, disabled or LGB people by asking 'What about discrimination against white, able bodied or heterosexual people?', it is apparently appropriate to respond to demands to stop discrimination against women with the question, 'What about men?'. So, as we say goodbye to the EOC and hello to the EHRC, it is increasingly important that policy makers and the public are not distracted from the reality that gender inequality disproportionately affects women.”

Marlyn Glen MSP welcomed the event and called on Scotland to keep women on the agenda politically, socially and economically. She said,

"The Gender Duty has been described as the biggest change to sex equality legislation since the Sex Discrimination Act as it requires all public bodies such as councils, the police and the NHS to actively promote equal opportunities between women and men. In short, its intention is to ensure that no one gets a poorer service because of their gender."

Other speakers at the event were Esther Breitenbach, Scottish Women's Aid, the Scottish Women's Budget Group and Zero Tolerance who asked that everyone sign the online petition on the Scottish Parliament website 'Tackling Violence Against Women' which calls for Government to renew its commitment to end violence against women by strengthening prevention, provision and protection measures.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Engender is a membership organisation that works in Scotland and Europe on an anti-sexist agenda to increase women's power and influence and make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society. It provides information, analysis, training, advice and networking to those people, organisations and institutions who seek to achieve equality and justice.

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¹ Care & Caring, Crime & Justice, Education & Training, Health, Housing, Income & Wealth, Participation in Political & Public Life, Population, Households & Families, The Labour Market and Transport

² A Gender Audit of Statistics: Comparing the position of women and men in Scotland' Esther Breitenbach and Fran Wasoff, University of Edinburgh. Commissioned by the Scottish Government

³ Suzi MacPherson, Napier University

⁴ In 2005

⁵ As an average in the years 2002-03, 2004-05

⁶ Identified by the EOC Equal Pay Task Force in 2001