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Engender<sup>1</sup> are delighted to announce that Pragna Patel<sup>2</sup>, chair of Southall Black Sisters and founder of Women Against Fundamentalism will be coming to Scotland to speak on 'Religion, Equality and Social Cohesion – Does it work for women?', at our Women Thinking Equality think tank on February 4<sup>th</sup>.

Pragna will also attend the Women's Dinner in the Scottish Parliament during her visit and will talk about the Gender Duty and the recent court case in which Southall Black Sisters successfully challenged Ealing Council over their attempt to cut the organizations funding. The SBS/Ealing Council case<sup>3</sup> highlights the current confusion around the Governments 'cohesion' agenda and how it is leading to attempts to withdraw funding from groups who cater for minorities under the guise of 'one-size-fits-all' services.

Engender Executive Director, Niki Kandirikiria, said today "As we move towards a single equality act it is upon all of us to ensure that the hard won gains made towards equality by and for women, black and minority ethnic people, lesbian, gay and bisexual people, transgender people and disabled people are not lost. The bringing together of these equality agendas should strengthen our position, not weaken it. The experiences of Pragna Patel, the Southall Black Sisters and Women Against Fundamentalism in protecting their services and projects from flawed decision making processes, incomplete analysis and misinterpretations of the law serve as a timely warning to those of us seeking equality for all."

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<sup>1</sup> Engender works to make Scotland a fairer, safer place where women can flourish and contribute to both the social and market economies with dignity, freedom and justice. To this end we seek to increase women's power and influence; make visible the impact of sexism on women and on Scotland's

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social, economic and political development; and support people, organisations and our government to make equality a reality.

[www.engender.org.uk](http://www.engender.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Pragna Patel is a founding member of the Southall Black Sisters and Women Against Fundamentalism. She worked as a co-ordinator and senior case worker for SBS from 1982 to 1993 when she left to train as a solicitor. She has remained active in the group in respect of its policy and campaigning work and is currently chair of SBS. She has been centrally involved in some of SBS' most important campaigns around domestic violence, immigration and religious fundamentalism. She has also written extensively on race, gender and religion.

[www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk)

<sup>3</sup> See Pragna Patels article in New Statesman <http://www.newstatesman.com/uk-politics/2008/08/religious-state-secular>