

10 September 2021

***Open letter sent to Their Excellencies, Permanent Representatives to 193 UN Member States, the two observer States and the Six Management Committees***

We write to your esteemed office on behalf of Split the Difference CIC registered in Wales, UK. We work to promote equality in services for men and boys in 13 specific areas ranging from health and education to housing and access to all social and legal services. A key focus area for our not-for-profit organisation for the year 2021 aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal Target 3.4, covering the subject of Suicide, under the Non-Communicable Diseases and Mental Health.

As per World Health Organisation (WHO) global data from the year 2016, the global average of crude suicide rates per 100, 000 of population is 7.7 for females and a much higher of 13.5 for males. In fact, regional averages also show a similar trend of higher rates in men than in females, presenting a striking contrast at 24.7, the highest figure for men and at 6.6 for females across the European region. Similar higher trends of male suicide rates are visible from the World Health Statistics Data Visualisations Dashboard available at the WHO website.

**Suicide Rate in the UK and lack of support for men and boys**

Tragically, in the UK suicide is the biggest killer of men under the age of 45 in contrast to women in the country, which is a third of men's: 4.9 suicides per 100,000. However, there exists a wide ranging mental health awareness and diagnosis facilities to support women and girls, legislations to safeguard interests of women and girls and a social and a legal system designed to support the fair sex, but not much exits for men and boys across the continents.

Suicide is a sensitive and a complex subject and the established social cultural norms do not provide men with an environment where they can safely express their traumas and come forward to seek help, as men are culturally conditioned to cover every adverse experience in the garb of their masculinity.

**Examples within Domestic Abuse Amendment Act 2021, UK and its impact**

The recent developments in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 in the UK and of domestic abuse legislation across all the European Countries, has its primary focus on ensuring the safety of

female victims through strengthening of the law, without considering the equal need to support the male victims of abuse, in case of a female perpetrator.

This domestic abuse legislation introduced in the UK, subsequent to a Violence Against Women (VAWG strategy) Consultation diabolise the whole narrative into “women the victim versus men and boys as perpetrators”, highlighting a disturbing trend in evolution of Gender Equality Law.

Whilst we realise the need of legislation to curb violence against women, but we firmly believe that violence is violence and men and boys deserve equal protection of and representation before law, as much do women. The realisation of gender equality and reduced inequalities,

the two of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, is impossible, if we keep excluding men and boys from the spectrum, focussing on women and girls alone.

### **The Istanbul Convention and its impact on domestic law in the UK**

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, popularly known as the Istanbul Convention, requires all the state parties to address all forms of violence against women (VAWG strategy), which indeed is a reformatory step. The EU signed the Convention on 13 June 2017 to fulfil its core objective of ensuring “equality between men and women in all areas”.

The UK and other countries are following the guidance from this legally binding instrument to bring drastic changes to domestic abuse legislation, criminal law, family law affecting divorce, child custody law, parental alienation, child safety legislation (key focus of all areas being on women majorly).

The Istanbul Convention is one of the most powerful legally binding instruments of our times affecting all aspects of law and policy reforms. Gender equality could not be reached without ensuring the unambiguity in language that treats all women and men equally. The very words in “*violence against women and girl’s strategy*” limits the scope of a “strategy designed to curb and eliminate a form of violence that could affect anyone, irrespective of their gender.”

An understanding of comparison of CEDAW and IC reflects the usage of overlapping phrases like ‘the structural nature of violence against women’ and ‘that domestic violence affects women disproportionately’, in conjunction recognising that men may also be victims of such violence.

For an international treaty with massive amendments to family law, criminal law, labour law and unprecedented impact on every single social policy of member states, mere recognition (as denoted by the usage of words ‘may’ and ‘also’ in ‘men may also’) and mentioning such

violence without assigning any classification makes the Convention completely biased and just an instrument to promote hatred and bias amongst women and men.

### **Impact of inequality on men and boys in accessing services**

The gender campaigns supporting every legislation in favour of women alone have now become a transnational and an increasingly global phenomenon, threatening the very basis of concepts of 'Equality and Human Rights for all', enshrined under Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art 1,2,3,6,7).

Such campaigns thwart men and boy's ability to thrive in all the areas where we all can flourish only through cooperation and coexisting peacefully, irrespective of our gender and sexual orientation.

The impact of the latest amendments to domestic abuse law in the UK, which largely favour women in all possible outcomes from police investigation stage to courtroom evidence and testimony could have an even greater devastating impact on mental health of men, their employment opportunities, social and political engagement.

All these factors inadvertently contribute directly to the increasing rate of suicides amongst men, as we keep snatching every possible support for men and boys using the doctrine of colourable legislation to implement policies that indirectly discriminate against men and boys and exclude them from the development agenda.

### **Proposal to Establish the Office of UN Men**

In context of the aforementioned and with all the power and authority that the United Nations is exerting as it guides the world in post-covid era, this universal organisation has no choice but to take the lead in setting up a UN Men which mirrors the construct and support it has shown the UN Women.

The establishment of a UN Men will encourage an all-inclusive approach that considers the needs of men and boys, and women and girls. The drafting of gender equality legislation or any other legislative or social needs represented within equality and human rights by the UN member states, will thus decrease gender inequality and gap in accessing all the services by men and women alike.

We, on behalf of Split the Difference, CIC present our formal request to establish a UN Men with the following recommendations for The Office of UN Men - United Nations Entity for Gender Parity

### **Recommendations for the Duties of the UN Men are as follows:**

1. Support and assist the Member States, inter-government bodies to formulate policies, global standards and norms that create an environment where men and

boys` growth and development also becomes the focus of key legislation with particular reference to them as is the practice with referencing the female gender.

2. Assist the Member States to develop research ability to gather statistical data on violation of human rights of men and boys and inequalities faced by them accessing all the services like education, housing, health care etc.
3. Provide policy guidance, technical and financial support to all the countries to establish a Violence Against Men Strategy on the lines of VAWG Strategy.
4. To promote global campaigns that support men and boys in need, as well to promote the accountability of the Member States in counter-balancing the radical, one sided and a biased gender equality narrative through regular monitoring of gender equality mechanisms.

Yours sincerely

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