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Maria Miller MP
Chair
Women and Equalities Committee
House of Commons
London
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10 December 2018

Dear Maria,

My name is Elizabeth Hobson, I'm the Director of Communications for the political party Justice for Men & Boys (J4MB).¹ Launched in 2013, it remains the only party in the English-speaking world campaigning for the human rights of men and boys, on many fronts. Along with our party leader, Mike Buchanan, I wish to meet with you and your colleagues on your committee, and offer a free screening of an important award-winning film. More on this shortly. I'm sending a copy of this letter to all the members of your committee.

As the mother of two young boys, I'm disappointed with the sexist bias of your committee, as reflected in its title. Eight of the current 11 committee members are women (73 per cent), and I believe all nine staff members are women. It strikes me as paradoxical that a committee that focuses on issues such as increasing the number of women in Parliament, to make that more representative of the general population, fails to reflect upon its own equivalent imbalance.

I note that your committee focuses relentlessly on women's issues, and invariably through a feminist lens. Whilst the gender imbalance of your committee is of concern – though I believe it *would* be of concern to the committee, if the prevailing principles were consistent – the feminist bias of the committee is far more troubling. Only 9 per cent of British women self-identify as feminists (Fawcett Society survey, 2016). If we add in men, 4 per cent of whom self-identified as feminists, the feminist lens through which your committee views the world represents only 7 per cent of the British population. Whilst gender is a poor predictor of a person's views, allegiance to a specific ideology is more often than not an assertion of a set of beliefs and a particular perspective. In the case of your committee, those are minority beliefs, and a minority perspective contrary to the democratic ideals of our political system.

On the rare occasions you look at men's issues – such as suicide, the leading cause of death of men under 45, in all age groups – you do so through a feminist lens. Your inquiry on the mental health of men and boys is a prime example, referencing gender stereotyping, a feminist obsession. The notion that gender stereotyping might be a significant driver of male suicide compared with (say) denying fathers and their children access to each other following family breakdowns – emotional abuse of children as well as fathers – is absurd.

¹ <https://j4mb.org.uk>

You and your colleagues on the committee (with the obvious exception of Philip Davies) should be ashamed by your absence from, and lack of contribution to, the International Men's Day debate, introduced by Philip on 29 November. You couldn't spare even 90 minutes of your year for a debate on issues affecting men, half the electorate? The presence on your committee of Jess Phillips, who infamously sought (as a member of the Backbench Business Committee) to deny Philip Davies the first parliamentary debate commemorating International Men's Day in 2015,¹ says a great deal about the deeply anti-male bias that is acceptable on your committee. Likewise Sarah Champion, cautioned by the police after being violent towards her husband. We called publicly for her resignation in 2016.²

The human rights of men and boys in Britain today are assaulted in many areas by the state's actions and inactions, usually to privilege women and girls. Our party explored 20 such areas in its 2015 general election manifesto.³ They included:

- Genital mutilation
- Armed Forces veterans' mental health
- Reproductive rights
- Homelessness
- Fatherlessness
- Suicide
- Education
- Criminal justice system
- Employment
- Paternity fraud
- Denial of access to children
- Anonymity for suspected sexual offenders
- Domestic violence
- Divorce settlements
- Sexual abuse
- Healthcare provision

The British state today assaults the human rights of women and girls *specifically* in no areas. None.

Given these *demonstrable* facts, the W&EC should be focusing considerable attention on the issues facing men and boys, but it is not – other than when they happen to be associated with characteristics other than their sex (e.g. race, disability...).

J4MB is a prominent organization in the international Men's Rights Movement (MRM), a rapidly-growing movement fighting for the human rights of men and boys. We hosted (or co-hosted) all four of the annual International Conferences on Men's Issues, including the one held at ExCeL London a few months ago.⁴ I suggest that our party is in a uniquely strong position to raise your understanding of issues affecting men and boys, and likewise the understanding of the other committee members.

How is the state able to trample upon the human rights of men and boys with such impunity? One explanation is the empathy gender gap, one of many issues explored in detail by William Collins, an important British blogger, over a number of years. He is, by common consensus, the most important blogger on men's issues in the world.⁵ The empathy gender gap is an archaic

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Z60LUV3V0E>

² <https://j4mb.org.uk/2016/09/25/mike-buchanan-calls-publicly-for-the-resignation-of-sarah-champion-mp-labours-domestic-abuse-minister/>

³ <https://tinyurl.com/V10manifesto>

⁴ <http://icmi18.wordpress.com>

⁵ <https://empathygap.uk>

feature of the human mind that causes people to prioritise the wellbeing of women and girls over that of men and boys.

One example is the differential treatment of men and women in the criminal justice system. When it comes to sex, the system is anything but blind. William Collins estimates that if men were treated as leniently as women in prison sentencing terms, five out of six men currently in British prisons would not be there.¹ Gender equality in prison sentencing terms would eliminate the prison overcrowding crisis very rapidly. Why are you and your committee not calling for it?

I now turn to another example of the empathy gender gap – the non-therapeutic circumcision of male minors, Male Genital Mutilation (MGM). The government has just announced a sum of £50 million towards the goal of ending FGM in Africa, while in this country collecting income taxes from those who carry out MGM. The double standard is outrageous.

A notable omission from your committee's web pages is the International Men's Day debate – indeed, I don't think you even announced when it was due to take place. Philip Davies's opening statement included this:

I also want to touch on male circumcision: male genital mutilation. According to a barrister's opinion, **carrying out circumcision on males when there is no medical need—non-therapeutic circumcision—is a crime under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, being at least actual bodily harm if not grievous bodily harm.** [My emphasis.] In 1983, Lord Hailsham, the then Lord Chancellor, said of female genital mutilation: "in the case of a minor under the age of 16, there is no possibility that consent is any defence at all. A minor under the age of 16 is not able to consent to the commission upon her of a criminal assault. Neither parental consent nor the consent of the minor would be any defence at all, and if the parents did such a thing, or instigated such a thing or participated in such a thing, it would only render them liable to criminal penalties, too."—[Official Report, House of Lords, 21 April 1983; Vol. 441, c. 677.]

When I put it to the Government in 2016 that female genital mutilation was already illegal before specific laws on the subject were introduced, they agreed that it was. When I then put to them the position regarding boys, they took a different line. They quoted Sir James Munby, who was the president of the Family Division of the High Court, in a case of January 2015: "Whereas it can never be reasonable parenting to inflict any form of FGM on a child, the position is quite different with male circumcision. Society and the law, including family law, are prepared to tolerate non-therapeutic male circumcision performed for religious or even for purely cultural or conventional reasons, while no longer being willing to tolerate FGM in any of its forms."

As the former barrister who I mentioned earlier also said, it would require a parliamentary override for male circumcision to be legal, and that has never existed. No exemptions to the law of the land are permissible for religious or cultural reasons. [My emphasis.] The Ministry of Justice went on to say that there was no doubt that female genital mutilation could have a physical and psychological impact on women, and also said that some girls die as a result of the procedure, which is absolutely correct. I do not pretend to be an expert in this field, but I believe that boys have also been reported to have died following a circumcision, and I have seen accounts of the physical and psychological impact of circumcision on men.

I understand that the position of the NHS is that the risks associated with routine circumcision, such as infection and excessive bleeding, outweigh any potential

¹ <http://empathygap.uk/?p=215>

benefits. I am mentioning all this because I believe it should be on the record, not least because of the very different approaches to male and female genital mutilation.

The Government said back in 2016 that they had no current plans to change the law in relation to male circumcision. Given everything I have said, there may be no need to change the law to bring about a change in male circumcisions. However, I would be particularly interested to hear from the Minister on that point.

It seems the equalities in which you and your committee are interested, do not include equal protection against genital mutilation for boys and girls.

Assuming that you and your committee lack a full understanding about MGM, which may help explain your lack of interest in it, we at J4MB are keen to assist you. The best way for you to learn about the subject would be, in my view, to watch *American Circumcision*, a recently-released award-winning film. It's not yet commercially available outside North America, but we have a contract with Brendon Marotta, the film's director, enabling us to screen it in the UK. We'd be happy to cover the costs of screening it, for you and your colleagues. A trailer is available online.³

Please find enclosed a few of the MGM-related leaflets of the sort we've handed out to many thousands of attendees at the last four Conservative party conferences. The one titled *Brit Shalom: A Peaceful Alternative* was produced by Jews Against Circumcision, an American group. It presents the substantial Jewish case against circumcision, whilst promoting a non-circumcision alternative, Brit Shalom.

Along with Mike Buchanan, I should like to meet with you and your colleagues, with a view to starting the process of putting MGM and other men's issues squarely on the agenda of the W&EC. That process is long overdue.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Hobson

Director of Communications

³ <https://tinyurl.com/AmericanCircumcision>

Copies:

Tonia Antoniazzi

Sarah Champion

Angela Crawley

Philip Davies

Vicky Ford

Eddie Hughes

Jess Phillips

Gavin Shuker

Tulip Siddiq

Anna Soubry