



Women and Equalities Committee

Wednesday, 13 December 2023

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Home Secretary
Home Office

[by email]

The UK's reservation to Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention

Dear James,

The Women and Equalities Committee remains concerned about the Government's reservation to Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention, which compels states to protect women whose residency status depends on that of an abusive spouse or partner.

In our recent Report on 'So-called honour-based abuse', we called for the Government to reconsider its position on the reservation to Article 59, in order to help limit the ability of perpetrators of honour-based abuse to use a victim's immigration status as a tool for control.¹ In the Government's response to the Report, the Home Office stated:

We are carefully considering the findings of the Support for Migrant Victims Scheme pilot evaluation. Once we have considered all the evidence in the round, we will communicate our decision on the Article 59 reservation.²

I have written jointly with the Chairs of the Home Affairs Committee and Joint Committee on Human Rights to your most recent predecessors on two occasions, requesting the Government provides our committees with six-monthly updates, outlining the steps the Government is taking in revisiting the reservation.³

In response, we have repeatedly been told that six-monthly updates would not be necessary, as the Government would have completed its review by then. On 27 July 2022, Rt Hon Priti Patel MP told us:

[The Government] will make this decision as soon as practicable, and, I would anticipate, in such a timescale, that the issue of six monthly reports to your committees would not arise.⁴

¹ Sixth Report of the Women and Equalities Committee, *So-called honour-based abuse*, HC (2022-23) [831](#), p 34

² Sixth Special Report of the Women and Equalities Committee, *So-called honour-based abuse: Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report*, HC (2022-23) [1821](#), p 11

³ Letters to the previous Home Secretaries relating to the Istanbul Convention, dated [1 July 2022](#) and [14 November 2022](#)

⁴ Letter from the Home Secretary relating to reservations to the Istanbul Convention, dated [27 July 2022](#)



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On 11 January 2023, Rt Hon Suella Braverman MP told us:

As my predecessor set out in her letter to you, the timescale of our review of the position on the Article 59 reservation is not one which would make six monthly updates to yourselves applicable.⁵

We are now 18-months on from that first letter; time enough for three updates, none of which have been forthcoming. We also note that the Home Office published its evaluation of the Support for Migrant Victims Pilot Scheme on 4 August 2023, and yet a decision on the reservation has not been made.

The Women and Equalities Committee will be meeting with the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) in January. Given the recent ministerial changes, and in advance of the Committee's meeting with GREVIO, please could you provide us with the following:

- An update on whether the Government remains committed to making a decision regarding the continuing reservation on Article 59I, and if so, when that decision will be made;
- Three-monthly updates outlining the steps the Government is taking in revisiting the reservation, should the Government's review of its position take longer than three months.

In line with usual practice, the Committee will publish this letter and your response on its website. I would be grateful for your response by Friday 5 January.

Yours ever,

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee

⁵ Letter from the then Home Secretary relating to reservations to the Istanbul Convention, dated [11 January 2023](#)