



HOUSE OF LORDS

International Agreements Committee

House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

Tel: 020 7219 4840
Fax: 020 7219 6715
hlintl@parliament.uk
www.parliament.uk/lords

Victoria Atkins MP
Minister for Safeguarding
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

11 February 2021

The Istanbul Convention

Dear Victoria,

I am writing to thank you for appearing before the International Agreements Committee on 1 February to update us on the Government's progress towards ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention).

We were very impressed with your determination to push this work forward. However, we remain deeply concerned that you were unable to give us any assurances that the necessary measures would all be implemented this year to ensure ratification can take place promptly. This is particularly troubling in circumstances where the underlying agreement was signed by the UK in 2012 and subsequent progress has been so slow.

We acknowledge and welcome the fact that two of the measures, relating to extra-territorial jurisdiction and criminalising psychological violence (in Northern Ireland) are being dealt with through legislation in Westminster and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively. However, it seems that the question of providing support to refugees and migrants experiencing violence and domestic abuse is not going to be resolved soon, and you acknowledged to us that work on this was unlikely to be completed until next year, at the earliest.

We noted your suggestion that one way to expedite the process of ratification would be to enter reservations in respect of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention which relate to non-discrimination on the grounds of immigration status (articles 4(3) and 59). Under Article 79 of the Convention, any such reservation could remain in place for a (renewable) period of 5 years. We have serious doubts about this approach, which could result in the issue of non-discrimination remaining unaddressed for a prolonged period.

We also note the proposal from the End Violence Against Women Coalition to amend the Domestic Abuse Bill to make specific provision for non-discrimination. A clause of this type could allow for the process of ratification to be expedited and we would support efforts to

introduce a clause which would provide adequate support to all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of their migration status. It should be possible for a clause of this type to be made to align with immigration control measures.

We believe that lessons can be learnt from this episode and that it would have been better to have implemented the Istanbul Convention in domestic law much earlier, by way of a single piece of legislation. We would like to reiterate our view that it is important for our international reputation that the UK ratifies the Istanbul Convention without further delay.

Finally, I would like to put on record that we were very grateful to be joined by two Members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which gave us the opportunity to follow up that Committee's important work in this area. This letter is copied to Harriet Harman MP QC, the Chair of that Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'The Lord Goldsmith', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Rt Hon the Lord Goldsmith QC
Chair of the House of Lords International Agreements Committee