

Black Women's Rape Action Project (BWRAP)

CROSSROADS WOMEN'S CENTRE 230a Kentish Town Road London NW5 2AB
Mail to: PO Box 287 London NW6 5QU Tel (020) 7482 2496minicom/voice Fax (020) 7209 4761
email: bwrap@dircon.co.uk website:www.bwrap.dircon.co.uk

Response to the Women's National Commission Consultation on "Priorities for the Ministers for Women"

SUPPORTING FAMILIES, PARTICULARLY AS THEY BRING UP CHILDREN AND CARE FOR OLDER AND DISABLED RELATIVES

Question 1

What, in your view, is the top issue to be addressed under this priority?

Immigration legislation: which establishes an apartheid welfare system discriminating against women and their families claiming asylum. Under NASS, asylum seekers get 60% or less of IS benefit levels and lack rights to refuse inappropriate housing. Denied support including NHS care once their claim is refused, many including mothers & children are left destitute or criminalised if trying to support themselves through waged work. Survivors of rape and other torture who are pregnant, have young children, or have physical and mental disabilities, are denied passported benefits and specialised resources. Contrary to official guidelines, breastfeeding mothers are detained without their babies.

Question 2

How might we take this forward? Give a practical measure that can be taken to make a real difference:

a) In the short-term (up to five years)

- End the official policy of forced destitution for asylum seekers and their families whose claims have been refused;
- End the voucher system and restore full benefit, healthcare and housing entitlements to all regardless of immigration status;
- Abolish the brutal policy of detaining women and families;
- Allow asylum seekers to take up paid employment on a non-compulsory basis;
- Stop the separation of breastfeeding children from their mothers and punish those responsible;
- Investigate what happens to women returned to their country of origin with or without their children.

b) for the next generation (up to 25 years)

Repeal legislation and dismantle policies such as those mentioned above which sanction sexist and racist treatment of Black/immigrant families. Assess and publicise the financial and other contribution of immigrants to the UK economy. Implement the 1995 Beijing UN Platform for Action commitment to measure and value women's unwaged work. Placing an economic value on our work will entitle women to the wealth and resources we help create, no matter where we are from, enabling us to care for our families and communities and countering the slander that we are "scroungers" unworthy of support or protection.

TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND IMPROVING THE WAY WE DEAL WITH WOMEN WHO COMMIT CRIMES

Question 1

What, in your view, is the top issue to be addressed under this priority?

50% of women seeking asylum in Britain are rape survivors¹ yet are not mentioned in this consultation.” 88% of asylum seekers have their claim refused at HO interviews,² 43% at Appeal Hearings, often despite compelling evidence of the persecution they fled. Once refused, they are vulnerable to destitution, exploitation and rape and other violence, detention and removal back to the torture they fled.³ Such policies fuel racist violence; yet only 7% of reported racist attacks result in conviction. Trafficked women are routinely denied protection and resources whilst anti-trafficking legislation targets immigrant sex workers.

Question 2

How might we take this forward? Give a practical measure that can be taken to make a real difference:

a) In the short-term (up to five years)

- Officially recognise rape as torture and persecution entitling protection and the right to asylum;
- Restore full legal aid entitlements, abolish fast-track procedures for asylum applications, which deny survivors of rape and other torture reliable legal representation, expert medical, psychiatric and country reports, the time and resources needed to fully present their claims;
- Statutory implementation of Gender Guidelines
- End the detention of rape - and other torture survivors;
- Restore benefits, provide safe housing and financial support for rape survivors, victims of racist attacks and women leaving violent partners, regardless of status.

b) for the next generation (up to 25 years)

- Repeal UK immigration legislation which makes women and girls vulnerable to violence, discriminates against, punishes and criminalises asylum seekers, e.g. that which imprisons people who flee with false or no documentation; makes women dependent on a partner's immigration status.
- Implement international criminal laws such as the 1948 Genocide Convention and 1984 Torture Convention, which make rape a crime against humanity. All who perpetrate/encourage others to rape, no matter where it occurs, whether they be people in positions of authority or family members, must be brought to justice.

¹ A “Bleak House” for Our Times by Legal Action for Women (Dec 2005)

² *Misjudging Rape, Breaching Gender Guidelines & International Law in Asylum Appeals*, by Black Women's Rape Action and Women Against Rape (Dec 2006),.

³ Letter to Gordon Brown “Appeal for Amnesty” signed by 118 women detained in Yarl's Wood IRC (28 May 2007)

EMPOWERING BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC WOMEN TO BUILD COHESION WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES AND AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

Question 1

What, in your view, is the top issue to be addressed under this priority?

Policies which promotes racism against Black communities and divide us from our neighbours: 1/3 of Black women nationally are “very worried” about racist attacks (4)⁴ while the conviction rate is less than 7%⁵, and racially motivated murders are increasing. 70% of Black/immigrant communities live in the 88 poorest local authorities.⁶ Black women⁷ earn 32% less than white women. Social cohesion begins by lifting the burden of overwork and poverty from Black and immigrant women, recognising our contribution as primary carers and our essential role in sustaining our families and communities which often face horrendous racism from police, courts, social services, etc.

Question 2

How might we take this forward? Give a practical measure that can be taken to make a real difference:

a) In the short-term (up to five years)

- Suspend, discipline and ultimately sack police, prosecutors, doctors, etc., who exhibit racist, sexist or other discriminatory attitudes and/or who bully, intimidate or physically threaten those claiming benefits and/or accessing other resources including those reporting crimes.
- Ensure that victims of racist attacks can report their assailants without fear of reprisal or that they or their family will be criminalised. Ensure vigorous investigation and prosecution of attackers. If attackers are neighbours, force them, not the victims, to relocate.
- Implement legislation to guarantee equal pay for work of equal value in every workplace.

b) For the next generation (up to 25 years)

Government must quantify and publicly acknowledge the wealth produced by Black and immigrant people to show how much we contribute to Britain and help end the scapegoating and targeting of immigrants and migrants as “bogus”/“scroungers” not entitled to resources;

- Sack government ministers who promote racism such as Gordon Brown for employing MP Patrick Mercer who attacked Black soldiers as idle and useless saying they should expect to be called “Black bastards”.

13 September 2007

⁴ Home Office (2000), British Crime Survey, Home Office: London; and Parekh, B. (2000), The report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, Runnymede Trust: London (www.runnymedetrust.org/projects/meb/report.html)

⁵ The Times, “*Why we believe the police have lost sight of rape*”, (17 Jan 2007)

⁶ Social Exclusion Unit (2004), Tackling Social Exclusion: Taking stock and looking to the future: Emerging findings, Social Exclusion Unit/Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London (www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=13)

⁷ Black women includes women of African and Asian descent.