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HOCS Reference: MIN/0009110/20

30 July 2020

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for your letter of 2 June to the Prime Minister, regarding the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Your letter has been transferred to the Home Office and I am replying as the Minister for Safeguarding. I apologise for the delay in responding to your letter.

The UK signed the Istanbul Convention in 2012, signalling our strong commitment to tackling violence against women and girls, and this Government remains committed to ratifying it as soon as we possibly can. The Convention is a landmark and vital instrument. Our measures to protect women and girls from violence are already some of the most robust in the world, and in most respects, we comply with, or go further than, the Istanbul Convention requires.

I would like to emphasise that ratification itself is not necessary in order to provide women and girls with the protections which the Convention specifies. We are already providing those protections. Compliance precedes ratification, not the other way around. Subject to the caveats below, we already comply with the Convention.

As you note, before we can ratify the Convention the Domestic Abuse Bill must become law and the provisions for a domestic abuse offence set out in the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill in Northern Ireland must be passed by the Assembly and implemented. The Domestic Abuse Bill was passed by the House of Commons on 6 July and has now moved to the House of Lords. The timetable for the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill is not within our control, as this is a devolved matter, but I know that Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive share my desire for ratification of the Convention to proceed as swiftly as possible and will do all that they can to enable swift passage and implementation of the new offence. At this stage, though, we cannot be sure what the timeframe for ratification will be.

With regards to migrant women, the Joint Committee on the draft Domestic Abuse Bill made recommendations about support for migrant survivors of domestic abuse on 11 June 2019 and we committed to review our overall response on 16 July 2019. The review findings were published on 3 July and are available on the GOV.UK website.

As I announced at Second Reading, we will provide £1.5 million to fund the Support for Migrant Victims scheme, which is due to be launched this autumn. The scheme will be designed to gather the evidence we need to inform future decisions on how best we target support so that it meets a victim's immediate needs and ensures that they are treated as a victim first and foremost.

I would like to thank you all once again for taking the time to write about this important matter. I am extremely grateful for all the invaluable work the co-signatories of this letter undertake in supporting victims of violence against women and girls.

I hope that this response provides you with the reassurance that this Government remains committed to ratifying the Istanbul Convention.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Victoria Atkins MP