

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

Harriet Harman QC MP
Minister for Women and Equality
Office of the Leader of the House of Commons
Dover House
Whitehall
London SW1A 2AU

May 18th 2009

Dear Minister,

I am writing in support of Amnesty International's 'No Recourse - No Safety' campaign. It is designed to both raise awareness of the gaps in local authority provision of specialised support services for women subjected to violence, and to object to the way that government funding rules are discriminating against women at risk.

As you will be aware, the no recourse to public funds rule denies those women that are not entitled to eg housing benefit and income support the right to access basic protection from abuse. Surely it is unacceptable that just because a woman holds a temporary, student or spousal visa, the UK refuses to uphold her most basic of rights?

The domestic violence concession is not working. Women are still unable to leave violent and abusive partners, because they cannot access funds for alternative housing or income whilst they claim the concession. Insufficient, long term funding is granted to refugees, whilst local authorities have no mandatory responsibility to eg provide specialised services for black and ethnic minority women, resulting in a system that is a post code lottery for abused women.

I would argue that the UK is breaching its own human rights standards and international standards such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), by allowing immigration status to determine what action is taken to protect a woman from violence.

So, I add my voice to those calling on the government to:

- Allow refugees the funds they need to protection from violence to all women suffering abuse.
- Provide for an exemption to the 'no recourse' rule to ensure women are not forced to remain with a violent partner.
- Develop an integrated strategy for violence against women so as to minimise the chance of policy contradictions undermining women's rights.

I look forward to your early reply and to immediate action being taken to address this serious failing in government policy. Thank you for giving this matter your full attention.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.