



THE BARONESS COX  
HOUSE OF LORDS  
LONDON SW1A 0PW

The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP  
Secretary of State for Justice  
House of Commons

14 October 2021

Dear Dominic,

**Re. Sharia-compliant marriages**

I was in correspondence with your predecessor, Robert Buckland, about the plight of women in Sharia-compliant marriages who have had a religious wedding ceremony but without legal consequences. These women often only discover their lack of official marital status when their marriage breaks down. They have no legal rights against their ‘husband’ and have no option of obtaining a civil divorce.

As many as 100,000 Muslim women in Britain are estimated to be living in these unregistered marriages.

You will be aware that I have campaigned on this issue for many years, introducing nine Private Member’s Bills since 2011. Many women come to me desperate, destitute and even suicidal, having suffered asymmetrical divorce inflicted by their husbands causing many problems including overnight homelessness, financial struggles and community ostracisation. Others remain entrapped in marital captivity unable to divorce, including in unhappy polygamous marriages.

Numerous groups – the Muslim Women’s Advisory Council, Equal and Free, Karma Nirvana, Register our Marriage, the Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow, Civitas, British Arabs Supporting Universal Women’s Rights, Aurat Supporting Women – have raised the same concerns. You will also be aware of recommendations of the Casey Review, the Sharia Law Review, Resolution 2253 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the recent Law Commission consultation and Nuffield Foundation study.

Yet we have seen little evidence in ten years to suggest that promises by the Ministry of Justice to ‘continue the exploration of reform’ will not be used to postpone viable legislation.

This week, I received the following statement in private correspondence from the Grand Mufti of Egypt:

*“...we believe that officiating and registering Islamic marriage has become a necessity these days to safeguard the rights of spouses specially women as well as children. We*

*are noticing countless cases of abandoned wives and children. We consider taking disciplinary measures to protect the abandoned wives as a necessary step.”*

Such a clear and stark directive from Egypt’s primary source of religious authority cannot be taken lightly. Urgent measures must be introduced to protect Muslim women in Sharia-compliant marriages.

I would be very grateful if you could respond to the Grand Mufti’s statement, which is deserving of a meaningful and rapid response from the UK Government. I would also be grateful for an assurance that you will ‘take on’ this issue – without further delay – by supporting my Private Member’s Bill designed to enshrine the rights of Muslim women who do not have the protection of legal marriage.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Caroline". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'C'.