



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Rt Hon David Gauke MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

28 January 2019

Dear Secretary of State,

We remain deeply concerned about the plight of many Muslim women in this country who are not officially married under English law. They can suffer grave disadvantages because they lack legal protection. What is more, they are often unaware that their religious-only marriage is not legally recognised.

Many of these women experience inequality in relation to: polygamy (practiced by men with multiple 'wives' and numerous children); access to divorce (for men often so easy it is effectively free and unconditional; women may have to pay a fee to receive help from a Sharia council); discriminatory child custody and inheritance policies.

Last week, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a resolution which urged the UK to ensure that civil marriages are conducted before or at the same time as religious ceremonies.

The Assembly's resolution reflects the provisions of Baroness Cox's Private Member's Bill, the Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill, which is currently before Parliament. It also reflects recommendations within the 2016 Casey Review and the 2018 Independent Review into the Application of Sharia Law, both of which were commissioned by your colleagues in Government.

We are encouraged by the Ministry of Justice's commitment to "explore the legal and practical challenges of limited reform" in this area. However, given that the problems are escalating, the need to find a solution has become an urgent priority.

We are therefore writing to convey our concern and our hope that the Government will act now to comply with the recommendations of the Council of Europe, relevant aspects of the Casey and Sharia Law reviews, and the provisions of Baroness Cox's Bill.

Yours sincerely,

Baroness Cox (Crossbench)
Philip Davies MP (Conservative)
Sarah Champion MP (Labour)
Lord Dholakia (Liberal Democrat)
Jim Shannon MP (DUP)
Lord Desai (Labour)
Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench)
Fiona Bruce MP (Conservative)
Lord Tebbit (Conservative)
Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench)
Baroness Eaton (Conservative)

Baroness Deech (Crossbench)
Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Labour)
Lord Rowe-Beattie (Crossbench)
Lord Swinfen (Conservative)
Lord Carey of Clifton (Crossbench)
Baroness Corston (Labour)
Lord Vinson (Conservative)
Lord Green of Deddington (Crossbench)
David T C Davies MP (Conservative)
Viscount Bridgeman (Conservative)