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**Press release: The Law Commission's *Celebrating Marriage: A New Weddings Law Report***

**Baroness Cox on behalf of Equal and Free**

On Tuesday, the Law Commission published their highly anticipated report, *Celebrating Marriage: A New Weddings Law*, and have recommended a radical overhaul of the current buildings-based model of weddings law in favour of an officiant-based system. The report and its recommendations not only acknowledge the potential vulnerability of those, particularly women, in religious-only marriages, but make provisions that could be capable of drastically decreasing the number of non-qualifying wedding ceremonies taking place in the UK. Their proposals increase the number of marriages that can be considered void rather than non-qualifying, affording individuals the protection of regulated legal processes rather than forced reliance on sometimes deeply discriminatory religious divorce proceedings. Moreover, the Law Commission report addresses the need for both members of a couple to be aware of their ceremony's legal status, so that any weddings taking place outside of the new legal scheme are done so with both partners' consent and awareness.

These recommendations are particularly relevant to an issue that Baroness Cox has been campaigning on for over a decade: The realities experienced by those women in Islamic religious-only marriages who had considered themselves legally married, until they either sought a divorce, or their 'husband' left, obtained a divorce, married another woman, or passed away. These women then discovered that under current law, they had no rights to finances or property and were subject to the rulings of Sharia Councils. Since this campaign has never received a meaningful Government response - though the 2017 Channel 4 survey found that over a quarter of women in Islamic religious-only marriages believed themselves legally married - the ramifications of the Law Commission report and such legislative change could be huge for gender equality in this country.

Baroness Cox, on behalf of Equal and Free, therefore keenly commends this report and its recommendations, which draw close similarity to her own Private Members' Bill: The Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill. We urge the Government to not only consider these proposals, but to commit to their adoption with great celerity, so that some of the most marginalised women in this country can have access to the legal rights and securities due to them.