

Statement by UK human rights, women's rights, LGB rights and child safeguarding groups condemning violent protests preventing women from speaking in New Zealand

Women who speak out about women's rights and lesbian rights are vilified and, increasingly, attacked not only verbally but physically. Many of us have experienced such extreme hostility, intimidation and violence. We stand with all women who speak for their rights.

Kellie-Jay Keen, a women's rights activist from the UK, has been prevented by violent protesters from holding a public open-mic event, and has been assaulted and forced to cut short her tour of Australia and New Zealand.

Videos from the event show a protester attacking her with tomato juice, and a mob threatening to crush her as she tried to leave the event after protesters breached security barriers. She was saved by event stewards removing her from danger; a meaningful police presence was nowhere to be seen.

It is clear that the police in New Zealand failed to protect her, and the many other women hoping to speak, from intimidation and violence at the hands of protesters. As a result the event was called off, and Ms Keen left New Zealand early.

As activists for women's rights, lesbian, gay and bisexual rights, child safeguarding and human rights in the UK, we condemn the actions of violent activists (while supporting the right to protest peacefully). We are dismayed by New Zealand's failure to provide effective protection for free speech for women's rights campaigners.

In its International Women and Girls Strategy, released on 8th March 2023, the UK government says that constraints on women's freedom of expression, prevention of women's engagement in public debate, and intimidation and threats of violence against women are major issues. The Rt Hon James Cleverly, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, says in the foreword: "We support all the brave women around the world who are struggling for their freedoms and rights."

We call on the Secretary of State, on behalf of the UK government, to join us in supporting the brave women speaking up for women's rights in New Zealand, and in condemning the violent protesters. We call on the Secretary of State to ask for an immediate meeting with the New Zealand High Commissioner to seek assurances on the matters of human rights and free speech in New Zealand.

We call on the UK government to engage with the government of New Zealand to demand to know why Kellie-Jay Keen was unable to speak in public and had to leave the country.

The UK government must ask New Zealand what it is doing to support freedom of expression and association in a free society, and in particular what action it will now take to protect the rights of women and girls to speak freely without fear of violence.

Sex Matters	Lesbian Labour	Keep Prisons Single Sex
Standing for Women	Merched Cymru	Fair Cop
LGB Alliance	LGB Alliance Cymru	Authentic Equity Alliance
Fair Play for Women	Trans Widows' Voices	Legal Feminist
Transgender Trend	Justice for Women	Bayswater Support Group
Safe Schools Alliance	Genspect	Our Duty
For Women Scotland	Scottish Feminists Network	Free Speech Union
Women's Rights Network	SOS Scotland	Women's Declaration International (WDI) UK
Conservatives for Women	Gay Men's Network	Alumni For Free Speech
Labour Women's Declaration working group	Northern RadFem Network	Norfolk Women
Liberal Voice for Women	Object!	Citizen Go!
	Lesbian Rights Alliance	