

9th November 2023

Dear Prime Minister

We ask you to take urgent action to halt an escalating campaign of violence and intimidation against women in the name of “trans rights”. Women are being threatened with social ostracism, loss of livelihood and physical violence; shouted down and intimidated at public events; and even subjected to physical violence – all for insisting on their freedom of belief and freedom of expression, and calling for existing sex-based legal protections to be upheld.

We urge your government to issue a call for evidence and to commission a rapid review on the impact of extreme transactivism on women’s rights, as it has done with other emerging threats to civil liberties and the democratic order. This will enable you to identify the specific actions that must be taken by the police, Crown Prosecution Service, courts and prisons to ensure that women’s rights are upheld.

Escalating threats

The campaign of intimidation and violence against women has been obvious for some time. The latest shocking example came on 31st August, when a violent criminal was acquitted on charges of inciting violence against women, despite video evidence.

At the Trans+Pride rally in London on 8th July, Sarah Jane (formerly Alan) Baker, who served 30 years in prison for horrific crimes, including kidnapping, torture and attempted murder, told the crowd: “If you see a TERF, punch them in the fucking face.” This incitement, and the response of the whooping, cheering crowd, were captured on film.

“TERF” stands for trans-exclusionary radical feminist. It is a slur often accompanied by misogynistic and sexualised threats. It is used against women who recognise the fact that men commit violence at greater rates than women, and that men cannot become women by changing their name, clothing or parts of their anatomy. This belief is also termed “gender critical”.

Initially, the Metropolitan Police brushed off women’s complaints about Baker’s threatening words. Only after multiple complaints from women and a public outcry did they arrest Baker. Despite his history of extreme violence and the evidence captured on video, the court accepted his explanation that his words were a “joke”, merely intended to get him some publicity and newspaper headlines.

Sex Matters is a human-rights organisation campaigning for clarity about sex in law, policy and language | sex-matters.org | info@sex-matters.org

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A criminal justice system that is failing women

A woman did not commit kidnap, torture and attempted murder, spend 30 years in prison for these crimes and then dedicate her days to rabble-rousing against women who defend their rights and will not be silent.

A man did.

Similarly, the criminal justice system panders to rapists, child abusers and other violent men who demand to be referred to as women. It demands at every step that these men's victims comply with this language, concealing the truth of male violence.

When women try to speak in public, the police fail to protect them from mobs of shouting, shoving, frightening men. When women are assaulted by these men, the police and Crown Prosecution Service are reluctant to bring charges. When a charge is brought, as we have seen with Baker, the courts fail to recognise the severity of the crime, or that it is part of a wider campaign of intimidation.

A whistleblower in the Metropolitan Police has revealed that at an official event for "Trans Day of Remembrance", a speaker told officers that anyone concerned about transgender ideology was a bully and bigot motivated by hate. Officers booed and hissed when a well-known women's-rights campaigner was mentioned.

This dismissal of women's victimisation is familiar to all women who campaign against male violence. Police dismiss domestic violence as "both sides" and regard women as bringing it upon themselves by "nagging". Women who complain about harassment on the street or at work will be told that they "can't take a joke". Women who are assaulted are told their own behaviour is the cause, and that they were "asking for it".

A campaign of intimidation

By now it is obvious that extreme transactivism constitutes a broad and sustained campaign against women who stand up for women's rights. The threats made by extreme transactivists like Baker are not merely theoretical. Men who harass women under the banner of transactivism do not restrict themselves to screaming abuse at women's rallies: they wave signs with slogans such as "Decapitate TERFs" and "Kill JK Rowling". And on occasion they commit physical assault.

This public intimidation and violence must be seen in the context of attempts – often successful – to destroy the livelihood of any woman who speaks up for women's rights. On the internet, in the workplace and in schools, universities, hospitals and other services, a woman labelled a "TERF" will be inundated with sexual and violent threats. She will be told to recant and apologise.

If she responds by explaining why it is important to retain protections for women and girls, she may be reported to her employer and often to the police. Shockingly, their powers of investigation are often then subverted to become tools of misogynistic abuse and coercion of women.

The most high-profile victim of this abuse is the author JK Rowling, who has written carefully and compassionately about sex and gender and has received death threats. She wrote: "We're living through the most misogynistic period I've experienced."

But thousands of ordinary women have been targeted too. In 2018 it was revealed that a Facebook group of academics acting in the name of “trans rights” were targeting gender-critical academics such as Professor Kathleen Stock. One member said: “File a hate crime report against her, and then the chairman and vice-chair [of her department].” Another said: “Drag them over the f*****g coals.”

We call on you, prime minister, to lead the fightback. **We urge you to condemn the violence and intimidation against gender-critical women, to commit to addressing it and to open a call for evidence.**

Yours sincerely

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Helen Joyce, director of advocacy, Sex Matters, author of *Trans: when ideology meets reality*

Naomi Cunningham, barrister, chair, Sex Matters

Baroness Bray of Coln

Baroness Finn

Lisa-Marie Taylor, Chief Executive Officer, FiLIA

Joan Smith, author and journalist, co-chair of the Mayor of London’s VAWG board 2013–2021

Karen Ingala Smith, CEO nia, author of *Defending Women’s Spaces*

Dr Shonagh Dillon, CEO Aurora New Dawn

Nimco Ali, FGM survivor, author, co-founder, the Five Foundation

Johann Lamont, former leader, Scottish Labour, MSP 1999-2021

Jenny Marra, Scottish Labour MSP, 2011-2021

Joan McAlpine, journalist and former MSP

Julie Bindel, journalist, author and feminist campaigner against male violence

Dame Jenni Murray DBE, journalist and broadcaster

Beatrix Campbell OBE, writer and broadcaster

Kathleen Stock, writer

Victoria Smith, writer

Susan Dalgety, journalist

Jane Clare Jones, Centre for Feminist Thought

Kate Scottow, free-speech campaigner

Sharron Davies MBE, athlete, Olympic medalist

Mara Yamauchi, athlete, two-time Olympian

Judith Green, co-founder and director, Woman’s Place UK

Lucy Masoud, barrister and director, Woman’s Place UK

Kim Thomas, director, Woman’s Place UK

Nicola Williams, Fair Play For Women

Fiona McAnena, Fair Play For Women

Kate Harris, co-founder, LGB Alliance

Bev Jackson, co-founder, LGB Alliance

Kate Barker, CEO, LGB Alliance

Bronwen Evans, LGB Alliance Cymru

Stephanie Davies-Arai BEM, Transgender Trend

Shelley Charlesworth, Transgender Trend

Tanya Carter and Tracy Shaw, Safe Schools Alliance

Heather Binning, Women's Rights Network
Trina Budge, co-director, For Women Scotland
Marion Calder, co-director, For Women Scotland
Susan Smith, co-director, For Women Scotland
Lucy Hunter Blackburn, policy analyst, MurrayBlackburnMackenzie
Lisa Mackenzie, policy analyst, MurrayBlackburnMackenzie
Kath Murray, policy analyst and criminologist, MurrayBlackburnMackenzie/University of Edinburgh
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Jenny Reilly, co-founder, Women Won't Wheesht
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Caroline McAllister, co-founder, Women Won't Wheesht
Janice Williams, OBJECT
Sarah Vine KC, on behalf of Legal Feminist
Stella O'Malley, Genspect
James Esses, co-founder, Thoughtful Therapists
Chris Goddard, Thoughtful Therapists
Karen Varley, founder and director, Conservatives For Women
Jeannette Towey, director, Conservatives For Women
Caroline Ffiske, director, Conservatives For Women
Alice Bondi, Labour Women's Declaration working group
Dr Hannah Ryan, Labour Women's Declaration working group
Mary Curran, Labour Women's Declaration working group
Jane Ayres, Labour Women's Declaration working group
Bronwen Davies, Labour Women's Declaration Cymru
Dr Zoe Hollowood, Liberal Voice for Women
Allison Jenner, Liberal Voice for Women
Maureen O'Hara, WDI-UK
Lynne Harne, Lesbian Rights Alliance
Carol Angharad, Lesbian Labour
Paula Boulton, Lesbian Labour and Lesbian Fightback
Stella Foster, Lesbian Labour
M Cameron, Scottish Feminist Network
K Cotter, Scottish Feminist Network
Dr Lorraine Douglas, Scottish Lesbians
Jenny Willmott, Scottish Lesbians
Dawn Furness, environmentalist and women's rights campaigner
Ali Morris, Merched Cymru
Michael Conroy, Founder, Men at Work
Chris Green, Co-founder Male Allies Challenging Sexism
Sarah Phillimore, barrister, co-founder Fair Cop
Harry Miller, co-founder Fair Cop
William Mackesy, Alumni for Free Speech
Graham Linehan, comedy writer
John Boyne, writer
James Dreyfus, actor

Andrew Doyle, comedian, author and broadcaster
Denise Fahmy, Freedom in the Arts
Rosie Kay, Freedom in the Arts
James Chiavarini, restaurateur
Rachel Rooney, children's author and teacher
Jane Harris, author
Gillian Philip, writer
Rose George, author
Onjali Rauf, author
Malcolm Clark, documentary maker
MrMenno, Content Creator and Gay Rights Advocate
Professor Alice Sullivan, University College London
Professor Sarah Pedersen, Robert Gordon University
Professor Jo Pheonix, Reading University
Professor Michele Moore, Northumbria University
Dr Shereen Benjamin, University of Edinburgh
Dr Heather Brunskell-Evans, author of *Transgender Body Politics*
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Jo Campbell, carer and lesbian activist
Venice Allan, women's rights campaigner
Ann Sinnott, Authentic Equity Alliance
Raquel Rosario Sánchez, Centre for Gender and Violence Research
Milli Hill, author and feminist campaigner
Tracey Smith, Labour Women's Declaration Working Group and Sheffield GC Network
Lynn Alderson, Labour Women's Declaration working group
Dennis Noel Kavanagh, legal commentator and gay rights activist
Julia Casimo, chartered accountant, Sex Matters board member
Jenny Lindsay, poet, writer
Martin Carr, Sex Matters advisory group member
Frances Weetman, writer
Beck Laxton, freelance designer and editor
Jo Bartosch, assistant editor *The Critic*
Pilgrim Tucker, PhD researcher, Open University (campaigner and writer)
Northern Radfem Network on behalf of all our members.
Simon Briscoe, statistician, Sex Matters advisory group member

Cathy Devine, independent researcher, Sex Matters advisory group member
Helen Saxby, feminist writer
Jeni Harvey, feminist writer
Sonya Douglas, artist, writer, poet, Sex Matters advisory group member
Nicola Carr, feminist activist
Julia Williams, writer and editor
Matilda Gosling, social researcher
Caroline Farrow, campaign director, CitizenGO