



National Assembly of Women

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Affiliated to: Women's International Democratic Federation, *which has:* UNESCO status B
United Nations (ECOSOC) status 1, ILO Special List

Ms Helen Hughes
Chief Executive
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Arndale House
The Arndale Centre
Manchester
M4 3AQ

16th November 2010

Dear Ms Hughes,

The impact of spending cuts on women

The Executive Committee of the National Assembly of Women met on 6th November to consider the impact of the public spending cuts on women. We have seen the figures produced by Yvette Cooper, MP showing that 72% of the impact of the cuts in the budget would fall on women with the most vulnerable losing most. We have also seen the analysis by Dr Ros Altmann, Director General of SAGA, that the speed of increases in the state pension age announced in the comprehensive spending review will disproportionately affect women. The cumulative impact of these cuts will be a widening of inequality between men and women which is quite unacceptable in a country which has legislating against discrimination for over 35 years.

It is particularly disturbing that the government seems to believe it can ignore the provisions of the Equalities Act 2006. The Treasury has now admitted that it failed to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment of its budget proposals. It has now carried out a token Equality Impact Assessment of the comprehensive spending review which the Fawcett Society describes as flippant since it "has explicitly chosen not to undertake any detailed consideration of the impact of benefit cuts, job losses or the slashed local authority budget."

This calls into question the government's commitments to gender equality. It also highlights your own organisation's role in holding the government to account and ensuring that it does not introduce policies which damage women. You say on your website that your role is "to ensure that fairness and transparency are at the heart of those decisions. The Commission will now look at this assessment in detail and come to an independent view as to whether or not it has served its intended purpose. Where decisions are found to have a disproportionate impact on a particular group authorities must consider what actions can be taken to avoid or mitigate the unfair impact." There is now clear evidence of the disproportionate impact these spending cuts would have on women and we believe it is now time for the Commission to use the legal powers open to it to challenge these proposals and prevent irreversible damage being done to women's job prospects, financial security and necessary public services.

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as you are able.

Yours sincerely,

Dona Feltham
President, National Assembly of Women

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