

PIC: LUKE TAPLEY

JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P SPRING 2025

WOMEN'S ISSUES

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women for refugee women

VIOLENCE, abuse and discrimination against women and girls is happening all over the world.

Banned from school and the workplace. Forced into marriages. Trapped in abusive relationships. Forced into sexual exploitation. Raped. Treated as second-class citizens. Cut off from the public sphere.

Why? Because they are women.

For many women around the world, they have no other choice other than to flee and leave everything behind, in order to save their lives and to be safe.

But the in-built inhumanity of the UK's asylum process means that – right here, right now – the world's most vulnerable women are disbelieved by default, heartlessly detained at random and are often left to 'live' in atrocious accommodation. Applications can take years in the UK as a result of a system that has been purposefully built to break people.

This isn't just wrong, it's shameful. And the UK's asylum policies are only getting more cruel, more extreme and more unsafe for women, especially those who identify as LGBTQ+.

This is no longer about fair or unfair – it's about life or death.

This is where Women for Refugee Women comes in. Women for Refugee Women works alongside refugee and asylum-seeking women to counter the hostile rhetoric, campaign for change, and advocate for a fairer and more compassionate asylum system for all women.

Chosen alongside the refugee women in our network, our three key campaigning priorities are: decision-making; detention and accommodation.

decision-making

Instead of being welcomed and supported, women are routinely disbelieved, forced to recount traumatic events – over and over again – and left in limbo for months – or even years – on end for their asylum claim to be heard. We should not shut the door on women in need.

Women seeking safety in the UK should have access to a fair and timely decision which recognises her specific experiences of persecution.

WRW is campaigning to dismantle the 'culture of disbelief' that means women are often wrongly denied protection; to repeal the Illegal Migration Act 2023 so women can claim asylum in the UK; and to push for an asylum system that is gender-sensitive, and makes timely and fair decisions.

detention

Immigration detention is a Government practice that locks women up in prison-like conditions whilst their immigration status is resolved.

Our ground-breaking research shows that the majority of women seeking asylum who are detained are survivors of rape and other forms of gender-based



FIG: SIMON TANG

violence, including domestic violence, forced marriage, female genital cutting, and sexual exploitation.

There is no time limit on immigration detention in the UK – the only European country without – meaning women are often locked up for weeks and months on end, with no idea of when they will be released.

This causes extreme harm to women seeking safety in the UK.

We are campaigning to shut down Derwentside (the main detention centre for women) and the small units for women at Yarl's Wood, Colnbrook and Dungavel; increase the use of community-based alternatives to detention; and end the use of immigration detention completely.

accommodation

Every woman should have a safe and supportive place to call home while she is waiting for her asylum claim to be heard. But current asylum accommodation falls far short.

Many women we support have been accommodated in hotels for months and

years on end – including mothers with their children – causing huge harm. Our ground-breaking 2024 research, *Coercion and Control*, revealed the dehumanising, degrading and humiliating behaviour women are subjected to in hotel accommodation.

Others are forced into homelessness, sofa-surfing, or staying in insecure accommodation, placing women at further risk of harm or abuse. This must change.

We are campaigning to stop the use of hotels as long-term accommodation for women; while women remain in hotels, to improve conditions; and to end the use of large scale accommodation centres.

We can't achieve any of this without the solidarity and support of people like you. If you believe the UK should Welcome Every Woman, join our community of likeminded individuals and receive infrequent updates on how you can campaign and make a real difference.

BY CARENZA ARNOLD, COMMS MANAGER
OF WOMEN FOR REFUGEE WOMEN
WWW.REFUGEEWOMEN.CO.UK/WELCOME-EVERY-WOMAN



FIG: NATASA LEONI

women's justice board



WHEN I wrote a piece in the June edition of *sisters* demanding:

'Stop Imprisoning Women Survivors'

I did not think that, two editions later, I would be writing that the government has set up a Women's Justice Board – yes! – to reduce the number of women in prison, including survivors of abuse.

Furthermore, I am pleased to report that I am on that Board.

I wanted to give Lord Chancellor, Shabana Mahmood, a standing ovation at our first meeting, on 25 January, when she pronounced:

"The simple truth is that we are sending too many women to prison. Many are victims themselves, and over half are mothers, leaving a child behind when they go inside.

"We need to do things differently... It is high time we found better solutions to help vulnerable women turn their lives around."

She looked forward to the day when she could formally close some women's prisons. I don't think any of us had heard a Lord Chancellor say anything so positive and definite, before.

The Board is chaired by Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Re-offending, Lord James Timpson who told us that one of his earliest memories of the prison system was waiting outside HMP Styal as a child whilst his mother took babies she'd fostered, in to see their own mothers. As he acknowledged, children like those are still more likely to finish up in prison themselves.

I think therefore that Ministerial commitment is strong.

the board

There are 10 Board members, as well as Lord Timpson and the MoJ Director of Offender Policy with the full list at the end of this article. There is an excellent array

of expertise and high motivation. There is at least one expert by experience amongst us. We will serve for 18 months, with an opportunity to renew. We will meet formally every quarter, but the work will be done outside of meetings, probably working in small groups, each to tackle a different stage of the criminal justice system, and upstream issues too.

We will be supported by a new Women in Justice Partnership Delivery Group, with external experts from the voluntary and community sector, recruited by open competition, as well as senior government representatives from other departments. This Group will be tasked with implementing the work we identify.

early considerations

I think we all accept that some women must go to prison. The concern is the ones who do not need to, and the harm that is done by ripping them away from job, home, family, friends and, above all, their children. Taking mothers away from their children can too easily become permanent. Prison not only causes the separation but, by breaking all the woman's community ties, can make her unable to offer a stable home on her release. Even if separation does not become permanent, there is abundant research to show that it is harmful; 17,000 children a year are separated from their mothers by prison, a poor legacy for the next generation.

Most women receive short sentences. 53% serve less than six months in custody and a further 17% less than 12 months. Nothing is achieved, in such a short time, to help them to tackle the complex needs that characterise women offenders. I think the magistrates would say that women come back to court, again and again, having committed the same crimes. They are relatively low level, non-violent crimes, but they run through all the available community-based sentences, leaving the bench with nothing but prison left.

However, there is a tonne of technology which can be used to control the movement and behaviour of a woman who gets a community sentence just as effectively as imprisonment does. The bonus for her and for the economy is that 'tagging' of one sort or another, leaves social and family links in place. The intensive supervision offered by the Women's Problem-solving courts, can often reinforce a community sentence.

Clearly there is going to be an increase in probation caseloads if this pattern begins to emerge. We are exhorted to look for cost-neutral solutions and we will do, but almost everything is less costly than imprisonment

We will apply thought, as quickly as we can, to how to avoid the unnecessary imprisonment of pregnant women and those with young children.

There will be much reference to the

Corston review. Most of it is still as pertinent as it was on its publication in 2007. It identified that in a criminal justice context, equal outcomes for men and women require distinct and different approaches. And the optimal approaches for women, which Corston prescribed, have never been fully implemented.

Women who offend through the impact of domestic abuse and other wrongs will probably need a special group of the Board to take options on and to dovetail our proposals with the Government's strategy to halve VAWG within 10 years.

We are tasked with producing a new strategy later this year, looking at options to cut reoffending like women's centres, drug rehabilitation and tagging which might better help women out of the revolving door of crime.

The other members of the Board are:

■ Kate Green, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester for Safer and Stronger Communities.

■ Dr Tom McNeil, Chief Executive of the JABBS Foundation for Women and Girls.

■ Katy Swaine Williams, a freelance consultant with research, policy and legal expertise on women in the criminal justice system.

■ Dr Shona Minson, research associate at the University of Oxford's Centre for Criminology.

■ Bernie Bowen-Thomson, Chief Executive of Safer Wales.

■ Michaela Booth, national lead for patient and family engagement at health-care services provider Practice Plus Group.

■ Anne Fox, Chief Executive of voluntary sector group Clinks.

I don't think that anyone could suggest that this is not a powerful bunch of people, with proven track records. We are all determined to seize the day.

DAME VERA BAIRD KC IS A MEMBER OF THE WOMEN'S JUSTICE BOARD AND NAW VICE-PRESIDENT

[HTTPS://WWW.GOV.UK/GOVERNMENT/ GROUPS/WOMENS-JUSTICE-BOARD](https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/womens-justice-board)

diary alert

Our fantastic NAW seminar is back in 2025 – keep the dates now!

Saturday 14 to Sunday 15 June

at the NASUWT's education centre in Rednal, nr Birmingham.

More information will go out to members as soon as available – and check the website!!

www.sisters.org.uk

questioning prostitution

ROBYN MARTIN ASKS "IS DECRIMINALISING PROSTITUTION PROGRESSIVE?"

SEX "work" is described as the exchange of a range of sexual activities for some form of material compensation. The material goods offered in return are most commonly money, housing and drugs.

At the heart of the sex industry are sex, class and race-based power imbalances. Most commonly, pimps are wealthy and male, and those most often prostituted are women facing poverty. The core issue with referring to this transaction as "work" is the issue of consent. To understand the issue of consent in the industry, it is essential to understand what initially drives women into it.

Inside Outside Scotland, supported by Encompass Network, is an aural recording project where women took part in recorded conversations with the Women's Support Project and with Dundee-based photographer Kathryn Rattray to capture their experiences.

Included in these excerpts are many accounts detailing the abusive relationship between themselves and the pimps, with a focus on the insecurity of their housing and wage situations. In some cases the women are even trafficked to Scotland under the threat of their families being attacked at home.

In Natasha's story, for example, she explains that she was brought to Scotland and told she could make upwards of £8,000 per month and only paying £250 per week in rent. The tenancy, of course, took place in a two-bedroom flat, alongside seven more girls, all of them sharing a "work" space.

There are many physical dangers associated with the sex industry. In a nine-country peer-reviewed study, which analysed data collected from 854 prostitutes, 73 per cent reported that they had been physically assaulted. Further, 64 per cent reported that they had been threatened with a weapon and 57 per cent reported that they had been raped.

Seventy-four per cent of women in Britain who enter the sex trade are in poverty. These women cite childcare responsibilities and the cost of living as key motivators for entering sex "work."

It is evident that mothers would rather sacrifice their wellbeing and consent than see their child go without food or heating. Women who face poverty therefore feel more inclination than other groups to join the sex industry.

Where profit and sexual gratification can be extracted from women's bodies, particularly impoverished women's bodies, pimps and punters will always say yes. Where women and mothers can be offered quick, albeit short-term, alleviation from poverty, they will most often say yes.

This reflects a clear power imbalance which clouds consent in place of profit

extraction, with little to no consideration of the implications of this on the woman's safety and wellbeing.

It is clear that the sex industry is therefore sexually exploitative. Its "workforce" faces more life-threatening and violent risks than any other industry. This has led to a debate on what to do about it. The most influential solutions which are discussed within the left are decriminalisation and the implementation of the Nordic model.

Decriminalisation of the sex industry refers to fully lifting all criminal consequences for those who purchase sex. This implicitly endorses pimping, grooming gangs and trafficking as mere businesses, marketing sex as a legitimate trade. This is because the means in which pimps are able to produce profit are facilitated with the legalisation of brothel-keeping. The legitimisation of selling sex as a form of "work" would also be advanced. The lack of exit services for those seeking to leave the industry would be reduced, increasing incentive to remain in the industry.

At the trade union level, decriminalisation is often marketed as a progressive solution to the issues arising from the sex trade. For example, at the BMA annual representatives meeting in 2017, motion 422 endorsed the full decriminalisation of the sex industry and argued that those involved in the sex industry and others in wider society would feel health benefits.

While this sounds attractive on paper, it ignores the further implications of those prostituted and propels clients' and pimps' ability to get away with violent crime. Although this motion was rejected, decriminalisation is often a debate which rears its head within trade unions and their democratic processes.

Decriminalisation and its endeavour to label prostitution as sex "work" conflates sexual exploitation and labour exploitation. As seen with the recently publicised "sex for shifts" scandal at McDonald's, this is an issue which can interlink and is advanced where there are precarious workplaces and contracts. However, it is important to view them separately in the wider context of the sex industry.

Labour exploitation refers to the imbalance of power between employers and workers. Under capitalism, employers must exploit workers in order to make a profit. To make a profit, the employer or capitalist sells the commodities produced by the worker for less than their value. In sexual exploitation, the commodity is a woman's body and the "employer" is a pimp. There are no "workers" in this scenario. There are only people who have been commercially sexually exploited and the pimps who sexually exploit them.

Therefore, decriminalisation is dangerous for women. It redefines women as sexual objects which may be commodified. In the context of trade union organisation on this issue, there can be no wins

for women who are sexually exploited via prostitution because there are no "workers" to organise. The only gains which can be made are for pimps and punters.

The Nordic model has been widely acknowledged for successfully limiting the harms of commercial sexual exploitation. This model decriminalises those prostituted and criminalises those who buy sex, while offering effective exit strategies for those who want to escape. Further, it endorses a holistic approach to education and training for wider society on this issue.

Its four-tiered structure has been adopted and implemented by several countries around the globe, including Sweden and France, which have experienced a marked decrease in prostitution.

Women who have been prostituted and therefore victimised should not be subject to criminal proceedings. Many prostituted women experience isolation, reintegration into society should therefore be the focus – not criminalising them for being forced to sell their bodies.

Offering support and access to exit strategies is crucial. Counselling services, housing and education would enable these women to fully participate in society once exited. This has been proven to reduce incentive to re-enter the sex industry.

The purchase of sex should be a criminal offence. As mentioned, consent is an issue which is blurred during the transaction of material goods for a woman's body. Further, prostituted women are exposed to a multitude of harms in this process. However, the Nordic model believes in changing attitudes and behaviours and so a holistic approach should be offered here once justice has been served.

Overall, we must actively advocate for the Nordic model to be implemented in Britain. We must choose the livelihoods of women in Britain over a pimp's profit.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE BEING ROLLED BACK. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN WOMEN TRADE UNIONISTS WHO ARE ORGANISING ON THIS QUESTION AND GET INVOLVED IN ADVANCING WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACROSS THE LABOUR AND TRADE UNION MOVEMENT, EMAIL TRADEUNIONFEMINISTCOALITION@GMAIL.COM

ROBYN MARTIN IS A TRADE UNION ACTIVIST IN SCOTLAND

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women at work 2025



WOMEN AT WORK IN 2025: EVERYTHING CHANGES AND EVERYTHING STAYS THE SAME? BY CLAIRE SULLIVAN

AS we have for more than a century, on 8 March we will mark International Women's Day – we will recognise and celebrate wherever we can, remember and mourn as we need to – and we will gather our energy and resolve and set our faces to the battles yet to be won.

In the same week, it will be my honour to chair the TUC Women's Conference and, as I approach this, I am also reflecting personally on 40 years as a woman at work, 10 years as an NHS physiotherapist and 30 as a full-time trade union official. I have been privileged to spend my career in organisations where women

comprise the majority of the workforce and yet, even here, we cannot say our work is done. 77% of NHS workers are women and yet we make up only 37% of the most senior managers.

As we approach our 115th International Women's Day, we must never underestimate what has been achieved – legally, rights to vote, to own property, to be paid equally, for sex discrimination to be recognised, and much more. And more widely than the law, we all benefit from the ground paved by countless inspiring, resolute and courageous women.

And yet, as I look forward to next month's conference, there is no escaping how much work there is still to do. While there might not be a retrenchment of legal rights, there most definitely is a significant regression of attitudes, behaviours and activities, with rising misogyny both in and outside the workplace. As always, women in minoritised groups suffer the most – Black women, women living and working in poverty, disabled women and those in insecure work.

Misogyny may be just a word but the many forms it takes are actions, causing lasting harm and damage to all the women they touch. We know from a 2023 TUC report that 58% of women report being sexually harassed at work and we know that still only 3% of rapes reported lead to prosecution. We know from UN figures that 70% of those killed in Gaza in the last 15 months have been women and children.

Although it is not the only one, we know too that misogyny, in addition to being so damaging itself, is a ready and dangerous gateway to the far right and the even greater threat it poses in the UK, across Europe and globally.

So, when several hundred women trade unionists come together in March, we will create a space that is all too rare for some – one of safety to have voice, solidarity and collectivism, where women can share past and present experiences and develop future strategies and action.

The TUC's 48 unions will debate 50 motions – many are on battlegrounds we all know – violence against women and girls, the need for greater rights, equal pay and gender pay, the menopause as a workplace issue, and appalling levels of sexual harassment. But there will also be an alarming increase in motions about the rise of misogyny in all its forms, its intersectional impact and the threat posed by the far right. And we will also consider new and emerging issues such as the disadvantage and discrimination experienced by women relating to the introduction of AI to the workplace.

We certainly cannot say the battle for women's equity is won but we can say we will redouble our efforts to make sure the struggle continues.

CLAIRE SULLIVAN IS DIRECTOR OF EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS AND UNION SERVICES OF THE CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY AND WILL CHAIR THE 2025 TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

trade union women



SARAH WOOLLEY REVIEWS THE CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN 2025

THE trade union movement has long been a force for workers' rights, fighting for better wages, working conditions, and job security. However, despite significant strides, women in the trade union movement continue to face systemic barriers that hinder their full participation and

leadership. In 2025, the movement must address persistent gender inequalities, discrimination, and new challenges brought about by evolving labour markets, economic shifts, and political landscapes.

underrepresentation in leadership

One of the most pressing challenges for women in trade unions is their underrepresentation in leadership positions. While women make up a significant portion of union membership, they remain underrepresented in decision-making roles. Many unions continue to be dominated by men at the leadership level, reinforcing structures that do not fully prioritise gender-specific workplace concerns such as equal pay, maternity rights, and workplace harassment.

The "glass ceiling" persists in many unions, with women facing difficulties in advancing to leadership roles due to traditional gender norms, unconscious bias, and lack of mentorship opportunities. Addressing this issue requires both cultural and structural changes, the move-

ment should be creating mentorship programmes, and actively encouraging women to take on leadership roles within the movement.

gender pay gap and economic inequality

Despite trade unions' advocacy for fair wages, the gender pay gap remains a critical issue for women in the workforce. Women, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, continue to earn less than their male counterparts, even within unionised industries. The pay gap is further exacerbated by the undervaluation of jobs traditionally held by women, such as care work, education, and retail.

Unions must push for stronger policies to eliminate pay disparities. Without a firm commitment to closing the gender pay gap, women will continue to experience economic inequality, undermining the very principles of labour justice.

harassment and discrimination

Women in the trade union movement

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the widf at 80



THE NAW AT THE WIDF'S BRAZIL CONFERENCE: FROM 5TH FROM THE LEFT, DONA FENTHAM, BARBARA SWITZER, JINTY FERGUSON

NAW PRESIDENT LIZ PAYNE REPORTS ON THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION AT 80

2025 is a year in which special anniversaries for the women's movement will come thick and fast. For millions of women across the world, struggling to defend their hard-won rights, now sadly under attack from every quarter, these celebrations and commemorations provide the opportunity to explore our collective history, to reflect on it and find inspiration. But, more than this, they help to shine a light for new generations of working-class women and girls, on the fundamentals of the tasks ahead as we build towards a peaceful future in which justice and equality prevail, free from oppression, exploitation and violence. In this article the NAW looks back at the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in its 80th year and at some of the initiatives it led that also have "big 0" anniversaries in coming months.

The WIDF, to which the National Assembly of Women is affiliated, was inaugurated at a Congress in Paris in late 1945. The impetus for this development came from women's anti-fascist, pro-equality and pro-peace internationalist movements developed during the 1930s and World War 2. These included the Union of French Women (UFF), later called Femmes Solidaires, who set up the Paris Congress. In all, 850 delegates from 181 women's organisations from 41 countries attended. They represented millions of women from across the world. Renowned French pacifist and feminist, Gabrielle Duchene, represented the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Women delegates from Britain came from the national section of the International Women's Day

Committee (IWDC), set up in 1942 and itself part of an international network.

The founding principles of the WIDF were to fight against fascism and for peace, without which there could be no equality; for the economic, political and social rights of women everywhere and for everything necessary for the health and welfare of children, including education and the eradication of poverty. These became, and remain, the key aims of the National Assembly of Women (NAW) founded on International Women's Day in London in 1952.

The WIDF worked closely with the World Peace Council (WPC), established in 1949 to stand against NATO, the war-mongering military alliance pursuing the collective interests of the most reactionary powers on earth. In May 1951 the WIDF made an important intervention in the Korean War. It sent an International Investigating Commission of women activists from Africa, America, Asia and Europe, including Monica Felton from Britain, to Korea to investigate the conduct of the war on the ground. The Commission's subsequent report, titled *We Accuse*, exposed to the world a range of American atrocities including the

alleged use of germ warfare. During the Vietnam War, the WIDF and its affiliated organisations worked closely with sister organisations in Vietnam and organised protests and solidarity actions throughout. One such project with which the NAW had close involvement was the construction of the Friendship Hospital for Mothers and Babies in Hanoi which finally opened in 1979.

Eugenie Cotton, a French scientist and antifascist fighter, was the WIDF's first president and went on to become vice-president of the WPC, a position she held until her death in 1967. Dolores Ibarruri, also known as La Pasionaria, a remarkable Republican political leader during the Civil War in Spain 1936-1939, and founder of the antifascist pro-peace women's organisation Mujeres Antifascistas, was a member of the WIDF from its inception and became an honorary vice-president.

The WIDF collaborated from the outset with other mass international organisations – the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) on campaigns for the defence of children and the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) on women's rights at work.

So many 'game-changing' initiatives for women and children over the years have been led by the WIDF. These included the designation of 1st June as International Children's Day, marked as such for the first time in 1950 and the organisation of the 1952 Conference in Defence of Children and the World Congress of Mothers in Lausanne in 1955. The WIDF took up the huge question of the impact of 'empire' on women living in colonial territories and was behind the Seminar on the Mother and Child in Africa held 60 years ago this year in August 1965 in Mali. By that time the WIDF was a huge force to be reckoned with. Its affiliate



palestine/gaza

organisations included over 200 million women worldwide.

It was as a result of a proposal by WIDF women on the UN Commission on the Status of Women 50 years ago that the United Nations declared 1975 to be the UN International Year of Women and designated the following 10 years as the UN Decade for Women to promote discussion on the advancement of women's equality worldwide. The first UN World Conference on Women in Mexico in June 1975 was described as "the greatest consciousness-raising event in history." Altogether four World Conferences were convened by the UN in the final quarter of the twentieth century. The fourth, in which the NAW participated, was in Beijing in September 1995. The Beijing Declaration on the attainment of equal rights for women, 30 years old this year, was the most famous output of the event.

As an affiliate of the WIDF, the NAW continues to participate in its work as a member of both its World Committee and European Regional Committee. One of the most valuable things that WIDF membership brings to the NAW is constant interaction with sister affiliated organisations which help us to gain an understanding of the experiences and struggles of women around the world, especially through meetings and statements. The NAW was one of the main organisers of an online Workshop on Women and War in July 2024, which drew a large audience and a unique set of contributions. Through the WIDF we have been able to access first-hand statements and reports of the brave contemporary struggles of women around the world, including from war zones in the Middle East and Africa. The latest statement from the Movement of Democratic Women in Israel is published on this page.

On the 80th anniversary of the WIDF, we have much to celebrate and much to emulate going forward.

Solidarity to the WIDF and its worldwide sisterhood!

The NAW is proud to be a member of this truly internationalist organisation.

BOTTOM LEFT: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY IN JAPAN; BELOW: IN ZIMBABWE



Trump's Delusions – To the Trash Bin

Statement from The Movement of the Democratic Women in Israel

U.S. President Trump has once again put forward imperialist schemes that are nothing more than the illusions of a megalomaniac. He plans to exploit the disaster befalling the Palestinians in Gaza – who are grappling with the horrific consequences of war, killing, displacement, and unprecedented destruction – for the benefit of his wealthy relatives and friends.

By siding with the government of bloodshed, occupation, and settlements led by Netanyahu, Trump arrogantly and crudely spoke of the "cleansing of Gaza" and proposed the mass transfer of Palestinians from their land.

The notion of "ownership of Gaza" not only contradicts international law but also reflects immoral attitudes and exacerbates the regional crisis.

The Palestinian people, rooted in their land and supported by peace advocates in Israel and around the world, as well as by numerous governments, will thwart these schemes.

We, activists of [MDWI], declare:

No to ethnic cleansing!

No to transfer!

Yes to the rehabilitation of Gaza by its residents with the assistance of supportive international powers.

Yes to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state along the June 5, 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, where citizens can live in freedom, prosperity, and dignity!

Yes to a just and sustainable peace between Israel and Palestine!

Nazareth and Tel Aviv, February 6, 2025

ءاسنلا ءكرل ءمرا عل ءري ترك سل ا- سق رم نيرسن
ليئارسا يف تايطارق ومي دل
تويترقومد ميشن تعونت لش تيللכה هريكزما- سوكروم ويرسن
"يدنت- لارسيب

Nisreen Morqus – General Secretary of MDWI

continued from page 5

often face workplace harassment and discrimination, both in their workplaces and within the unions themselves. Sexual harassment remains a widespread problem, with many women feeling unsafe or unsupported when they report misconduct.

Unions must take a proactive stance against harassment by implementing robust reporting mechanisms, enforcing zero-tolerance policies, and providing training for reps and members on the importance of challenging sexual harassment, how to support a member who has made a disclosure and also on bystander intervention. Ensuring that unions are safe spaces for all workers, including women, is fundamental to maintaining an inclusive and effective labour movement.

precarious work/gig economy

The rise of precarious work and the gig economy presents unique challenges for women in the workforce. Women are disproportionately represented in part-time, temporary, and gig work, which often lacks the protections and benefits associated with traditional employment. Many women juggle multiple jobs while managing caregiving responsibilities, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and job insecurity.

Trade unions must adapt to these shifting labour dynamics by advocating for policies that extend worker protections to gig and precarious workers starting by pushing for single worker status to be at

the forefront of the Employment Rights Bill. Additionally, unions should explore innovative organising strategies to reach and support women in non-traditional employment.

balancing work and family responsibilities

Women continue to bear a disproportionate share of caregiving responsibilities, whether for children, elderly parents, or other dependents. The lack of adequate parental leave policies, affordable childcare, and flexible work arrangements makes it difficult for women to fully participate in the workforce and in trade union activities.

Unions should champion family-friendly workplace policies, including paid parental leave, flexible working hours, and access to affordable childcare. Additionally, within the union movement itself, there should be greater efforts to accommodate women with caregiving responsibilities, such as scheduling meetings at family-friendly times and offering virtual participation options.

intersectional barriers

Women in the trade union movement do not face challenges in isolation – race, class, disability, and other intersecting identities compound their struggles. BAME women, migrant workers, LGBTQ+ individuals, and disabled women often experience multiple layers of discrimination that make it even more difficult to gain equitable treatment and leadership opportunities within unions.

To address these intersectional barriers, unions must embrace a more inclusive approach, ensuring that policies and advocacy efforts recognise and respond to the unique challenges faced by diverse groups of women. This includes amplifying the voices of marginalised women, fostering allyship, and implementing policies that promote inclusivity.

digital exclusion and technological disruptions

The increasing digitisation of work poses both opportunities and challenges for women in the trade union movement. While digital platforms can enhance organising efforts, they can also exclude women who lack access to technology or digital literacy skills. Moreover, automation and AI-driven job displacement disproportionately affect women in certain industries, threatening job security.

Unions must prioritise digital inclusion by providing training programmes, ensuring equitable access to technology, and advocating for policies that mitigate the gendered impact of automation. Additionally, unions should leverage digital tools to engage women workers more effectively and ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

The trade union movement in 2025 stands at a crossroads. While progress has been made, significant challenges remain in ensuring that women achieve full equality within the movement. Addressing leadership disparities, closing the gender pay gap, combatting workplace harassment, supporting caregivers, and embracing intersectionality are essential steps toward a more inclusive and equitable labour movement.

Trade unions must take a proactive and intersectional approach to addressing these challenges, ensuring that all women – regardless of their background – can fully participate in and benefit from collective organising, otherwise we will see a repeat of the hundreds of thousands of women leaving the movement each year because they don't feel it is a home for them.

SARAH WOOLLEY IS GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE BAKERS, FOOD AND ALLIED WORKERS UNION AND NAW VICE PRESIDENT

The National Assembly of Women sends greetings on International Women's Day to all members, affiliates and supporters. Let's continue the campaign for peace, equality and social justice for women the world over!

what's on...

NAW Executive Committee meetings are open to all members. The next ones (online) will be on 8 April and 8 May at 17.00. For more information about the meetings please contact the Secretary, Sandra Durkin, on naw@sisters.org.uk or at NAW, 72 Beaconsfield Road Coventry CV2 4AR

join the NAW now!

*I would like to join the NAW. Here is £20 for the annual subscription (£10 unwaged) which includes my subscription to **sisters**, the journal of the NAW.*

Our organisation would like to affiliate to the NAW. Enclosed is: £20 (local organisation/NAW branch), £45 (regional organisation), £60 (national)

Name _____

Address _____

_____ postcode _____

Organisation _____

phone _____ email _____

Send to: Carolyn Simpson, c/o 26 Birchanger Road, London SE25 5BB