



Women and Human Rights

“Men, their rights, and nothing more; women, their rights, and nothing less.”
Susan B Anthony

When Catharine A. MacKinnon asked “Are Women Human?” in her 2006 book, you could have been forgiven for thinking the answer was obvious.

There is no doubt that women are biological human beings, however, from a political perspective women’s human rights, despite international treaties and UK law, are often overlooked. As MacKinnon asserts “Equality guarantees are everywhere, but nowhere is there equality.”

The question is why? Why in 2020 do women’s rights remain unfulfilled? This leads to, amongst other things, a loss of income, exploitation of inadequate criminal justice systems by abusers, along with a reduction in life opportunities.

Caroline Criado Perez identified the invisibility of women across society as a major block in women’s rights being recognised. It is man and his experience of the world which is taken as the default human experience, and women’s needs are omitted. Perez highlighted that “If there is a gap for women overall ... when it comes to women of colour, disabled women, working-class women, the data is practically non-existent.” When these groups are the most likely to use health and social care services this has significant impacts on women’s lives, and those who depend on them.

In 1986 the UK government ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This means “.. the UK agrees to take measures to ensure women’s full enjoyment of human rights on an equal basis with men.” (Equality and Human Rights Commission).

In 2020, women in the UK continue to; be paid less than men; be under-represented at all levels of society, including Government, provide the majority of care to children, the sick and elderly and experience high levels of violence and abuse, with limited success in accessing justice.

The 1998 Human Rights Act incorporated the European convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into British law. This essential Act enshrines the original desires for a “foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the World.” (United Nations). The impact on women’s lives in the UK however has been limited, even more so if you are subject to Immigration Laws or trafficking.

Hannah Ardent talked about the “right to have rights” in 1951. Ardent was a refugee from Germany and understood human rights as controlled by Governments, predominantly through citizenship. Ardent however believed a person’s rights should not be determined by their citizenship status. That all humans have rights.

“The decisive factor is that these rights and the human dignity they bestow should remain valid and real if only a single human being existed on earth; they are independent of human plurality and should remain valid even if a human being is expelled from the human community.” (Ardent, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (2017))

The challenge in relation to women is if we are not seen in data or our needs recognised in reality, how can we ensure women can access their rights at all? Ensuring women are heard and seen is essential otherwise we have to return to the original question, “Are women human?”

EVENT RESULTS

THEME: Human rights often feel out of reach and irrelevant in everyday life. We can be confused by what our legal rights are, how human rights are portrayed by the media and the mismatch between what we are told are our human rights and how we are treated.

This Summary outlines women's discussion about what we believe our human rights are, how these should be respected and how they impact on our lives.

PARTICIPANTS: A total of 87 women from local communities, representing a wide range of backgrounds, convened 24 break-out groups on issues with 73 proposed actions over two sessions. (6th Oct 2011 & 28th Jan 2015).

TOP SEVEN PRIORITIES VOTED BY PARTICIPANTS (NUMBER OF VOTES)

October 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend time and communicate with your children daily. 28 votes • Recognising what is cultural rather than integral to essence of faith through awareness raising – for self and others. 22 votes • To promote and encourage girls and young women (well all of us really!) to raise their self esteem through a positive self-image and not be pressured to conform. 15 votes • Making links/partnerships with women in religion. 14 votes • Separation of church and state. 13 votes

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

October 2011	January 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education/Awareness raising 30 votes • Campaigning/Lobbying – legislative change 25 votes • Personal/attitude shift 162 votes • Making connections 51 votes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education/Training/Awareness raising 109 votes • Individual action/mind-set change 67 votes • Organised action 24 votes

DETAILED RESULTS FROM THE WORKING GROUPS, 10 VOTES OR ABOVE

October 2011	January 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking individual responsibility. 11 votes • False: Separation of church and state. 13 votes • Make available information for all young people regardless of schooling. 0 votes • Break the rules!! 10 votes • To promote and encourage girls and young women (well all of us really!) to raise their self esteem through a positive self-image and not be pressured to conform. 15 votes • Sexual health education at all levels – dialogue and communication between partners to have a love relationship not just a sexual relationship. 11 votes • Women should take hold of their lives and get involved. 10 votes • To accept people in whatever situation they face. 10 votes • Parent – responsibility: loving guider. 11 votes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be the change you want to see. Support women who are speaking out and/or leading. 12 votes • Dedicate a day in the year to raise awareness about domestic abuse by preaching a sermon (all faiths). 11 votes • Training for all faith leaders. 11 votes • Awareness in schools. Challenge myths/stereotypes about Islam. Asking questions. Opening up discussion. 14 votes • Challenge the media!! Don't buy into racist, sexist, homophobic magazines. 16 votes • Faith schools create division and should be replaced with schools promoting equality and diversity (don't know if any currently do this). 35 votes • Curriculum should be more balanced to reflect diversity promoting similarities not differences. 15 votes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Good dialogue. ○ Seek support as you need it. ○ Self awareness with faith, confident. ● Increased regulation/codes of conduct for media. 11 votes ● Recognising what is cultural rather than integral to essence of faith through awareness ● Spend time and communicate with your children daily. 28 votes ● Need to influence religious policy. 23 votes ● Withdraw financial contributions. 12 votes ● Making links/partnerships with women in religion. 14 votes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actively promote opportunities for diverse communities to come together to open up positive dialogues. 17 votes ● Don't make presumptions about people's religion – feel able to ask and keep an open mind. Learn and accept! 24 votes
---	---