



## **Response to statement from Women's Aid**

Frontline Feminists Scotland welcomes the statement from Women's Aid in England. We recognise that making this statement will have been challenging in the current climate.

We stand in solidarity with all our sisters who continue to strive for safe spaces for women and children, who experience the extreme sexism of male violence against women and children, and recognise the survivors who risked all, including their lives, to build the women's aid movement across the UK and other violence against women services.

The Women's Aid statement highlights this history and this reality for women who experience violence and abuse, based on their sex. We agree that affiliated organisations are autonomous and therefore are best placed to determine their own approach and welcome the consultation with this network of groups and stakeholders.

This is in stark contrast with our experience in Scotland. In a timely response Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) re-released their original "position statement on Transgender Women."

Nowhere in the statement did SWA recognise the extreme sexism that women experience through domestic abuse as sex based. Frontline Feminists Scotland recognises that gender is not "biological, but learned", but this ideology is based in the sex oppression of women. It is no accident that women experience the inequalities it establishes from birth. Feminists have recognised for centuries that gender is based on sex and stereotypes that must be demolished if we are to overcome the inequality it breeds. This is not achieved by denying the reality of women and the trans community.

SWA states that "gender-based violence" "incorporates all violence against women. However it also includes violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in the form of homophobic and transphobic hate abuse in any setting."

There is no doubt that homophobic and transphobic oppression, in all forms, is a scourge on our society, but this is not challenged by reinforcing the stereotypes that support it. By incorporating transwomen into women's services we do not respect the campaigning of the trans community to be recognised politically, we do not create supportive spaces to develop a political response to their oppression and we do not ensure survivors in the trans community receive the support they require. Scottish Women's Aid was set up, by women, many of whom were survivors, and local groups, to address the epidemic of male violence against women. The language may have changed, but the reality is the same for women.

Language is essential in this debate, not only to ensure women are heard, but also to give guidance to our laws and services that support the most vulnerable people. Clarity of language can be challenging for services, trying to balance provision with lobbying. We have however over the past 3 years seen the result of this dilution of language, as displayed in the SWA statement. Hundreds of thousands of tax payers money is being spent on ensuring one word, "woman", is recognised as a legitimate descriptor for half the population, confusion and fear in services essential for women and children whose very lives are at risk, thousands of women across Scotland and beyond spending time and energy that could be used for the progress of society as whole, including the eradication of violence against women, demanding their very existence be recognised.

Something is wrong in this country when women can no longer rely on the very services that survivors created to provide refuge, healing and safety for them and their children, something is very broken when these spaces are no longer defended .

Our politicians are sabotaging decades of expertise, drawn from specialist women's service delivery, through use of language that stretches beyond material reality.). Women are crying out for their lived experience to be recognised and their safe spaces defended. Scotland needs to create services that support the trans community, but this should never be at the expense of safe spaces for women and children. Any organisation that supports the dilution of women's rights and uses ill-informed politicians to advance this approach not only puts services and women's lives at risk, but also fails the political process.

We therefore welcome Women's Aid England's statement. We would welcome further discussion on how we can stand in solidarity to progress the sex-based rights of women who experience beatings, rape, torture and abuse everyday of their lives. We welcome the opportunity to work to return to services that are run by and for women, where women's voices matter.