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To whom it may concern

Women's Resource Centre Response to the CPS Violence Against Women Strategy

The Women's Resource Centre welcomes the CPS Strategy on Violence Against Women. There are a number of features which make it an example of best practice.

In particular we commend the CPS for carrying out an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment before finalising the strategy. This is the first example of this we have come across and would like to see this become the standard approach to developing policy.

Furthermore, the strategy contextualises violence against women within a broader equalities and human rights framework which combined with a solid evidence base about the gendered nature of violence clearly establishes the need for a dedicated strategy about violence against women. The research clearly shows that whilst men can be victims of violence by women, it is overwhelmingly men who are the perpetrators and women who are the victims.

We are pleased to find that the strategy draws upon the work of the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) and supports their demand for an integrated strategy on violence against women by setting out the key issues which such a strategy would be able to address. To have a key organisation such as the CPS articulating the arguments for taking gender in to account sends out a strong message that it takes violence against women seriously which will help to strengthen the arguments of those working at a grassroots level to support women.

As EVAWs research has highlighted, there is a postcode lottery of services for women who have experienced violence and the current 'crisis' in Rape Crisis services has hit the headlines. In spite of the demand, there has been a collective failure of statutory organisations, centrally and locally, to provide funding to specialist, women-only services which provide crucial support to women who have been raped, sexually assaulted or experienced childhood sexual abuse.

There are many reasons why violence against women has been a low priority but a major one is the widespread belief that women have achieved equality. This has influenced government, resulting in a gender-neutral approach to policies which render inequalities between women and men invisible.

This strategy is an excellent example of policy rooted in a clear evidence base and underpinned by an equality and human rights framework which makes the links between women's experience of violence and wider forms of discrimination.

In our view, the strategy would be more robust if it was broadened to focus on other forms of violence, particularly rape and sexual violence. The strategy itself highlights that a potential benefit of a VAW strategy would be its ability to:

'tackle the cross cutting connections between some of these crimes...e.g. trafficking and prostitution; forced marriage and so-called honour crimes; domestic violence, sexual offences and child abuse...'

(page 14)

The CPS will be well aware of the statistics on rape and sexual violence. It is conservatively estimated that 80,000 women suffer rape and attempted rape every year.¹ With regards to sexual violence, statistics show that rape allegations resulting in convictions are at an all-time low, having dropped from 24% in 1985, to just 5.6% in 2002.²

However, the focus of this strategy is largely on domestic violence. We recommend that the CPS carries out further research on other forms of violence to ensure that the final strategy adopts the integrated approach to which it aspires.

About the Women's Resource Centre

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is a charity which supports women's organisations to be more effective and sustainable. We provide training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding.

Our members work in a wide range of fields including violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women.

There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for our members who support almost half a million individuals each year.

Sincerely,

Karen Moore
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¹ Walby and Allen (2004) Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey. Home Office: London.

² Kelly, L., Lovett, J. and Regan, L. (2005) A gap or a chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases, Home Office Research Study 293, Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate: London.