

Mr. Scott Morrison, Prime Minister

23rd March, 2021

#March4Justice – Enough!

I am writing with much disgust and a great deal of concern about the lack of progress in making changes to improving conditions and justice for women and the lack of LEADERSHIP from senior government members on this matter.

Even this week we continue to hear reports of disgusting and abhorrent behaviours by men in Parliament House. It is not just limited to the rancid acts of men towards women but the reports of a significant coverup that appears to be currently in progress in your own office.

I know Prime Minister, that you will not read this letter, but I hope that your staffers have the decency to continue to pass on the thoughts of the people of Australia on the matter at hand. It is the only way you might start to take some ACTION and ACCOUNTABILITY and make some change on this issue.

I was dismayed to hear at the recent #March4Justice gathering of concerned Australians that you actively declined the invitation to attend. What an appalling act of neglect and disrespect to those attending and those waiting for justice.

I was angry, along with my other 100 or so marchers in the #March4Justice in Port Fairy and the thousands of marchers across the country. We heard from strong and brave women about their stories and experiences of abuse and lack of support. I too, like more than one in five women have suffered abuse from men in authority over my lifetime, taking advantage of their power.

This week we even hear the imploring speech of a Brisbane high school student to his class mates to take action and responsibility for the respectful treatment of women. It is certainly worth watching for his words, his passion and his pleas.

Following the #March4Justice rallies, I wonder what a very loud and outspoken group of people in our community can do to support the ongoing fight for justice and equality for women. While I may be unable to attend some of the suggested future rallies and delegations to Parliament House, I feel I need to do more and you all have to DO more.

I am therefore writing to you to ask for your support as our Prime Minister to advance the cause of women at every chance you get in private, in public and most of all in Parliament. Speak up for women, speak up against sexism, misogyny, bigotry, predators and racists. Be an example. Be loud. Call out bad behaviour and first of all listen to those who have been abused.

Our Federal Government has over the past month in particularly displayed a very poor understanding of the issues of gender equality and sexual harassment that women and men are angry about including the following:

- behaviours that have NOT been displayed:
 - listening
 - demonstrating empathy
 - RESPECT
 - Accountability as parliamentarians
 - Responsibility as men and parliamentarians and staffers
 - ACTION

- behaviours that have been displayed;
 - Talking over others including the PM at a press conference with Anne Ruston
 - Cowardice (hiding during the March4Justice)
 - Hiding behind “rule of law” mantra
 - Double standards in treatment of women (Christian Porter gets to take fully paid leave while fighting defamation case yet women who are caught up in domestic violence are asked to dip into their Superannuation Funds to support themselves)
 - Inappropriate speeches demonstrating lack of understanding such as the comments regarding peaceful protests.

There are so many steps that can be taken immediately and some which may take longer, but we cannot abide the lack of ACTION for your Parliament and its members. STOP the procrastination now!!!

Here are a few suggestions of what ACTIONS can be taken immediately:

1. LISTEN to and BELIEVE reports of sexual assault and violence in your workplace.

2. DEMONSTRATE LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

3. CALL OUT unacceptable actions whenever you see them or hear of them and take ACTION on the toxic workplace in Parliament House. Make Men ACCOUNTABLE for their poor behaviour.

4. ENDORSE amendments to the Sex Discrimination act tabled by Independent MP Zali Steggal and her cross bench counterparts Rebecca Sharkey and Helen Haines this week in Parliament. (Note this is one of the recommendations of the Respect@Work report)

5. Consider and take ACTION on supporting change in the legal system to ensure true justice for those who are brave enough to report sexual harassment, violence and assault.

6. READ and IMPLEMENT the Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report (2020) recommendations. Ironically the Australia’s Sex Discrimination Commissioner states in her foreword “I deliver this report with a sense of urgency and hope”. Some of

the key general actions you could undertake as a response to this report are:

- Understand the key areas for Primary Prevention
- Introduce a new framework for workplaces (including Parliament House)
- Demonstrate Leadership- where is it??
- Knowledge and understanding – read the report would be a good start!
- I have included the link for your convenience 😊

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/respectwork-sexual-harassment-national-inquiry-report-2020>

Here are a few recommendations that are ready for IMMEDIATE ACTION:

Recommendation 1: *The Australian Government work with state and territory governments to implement the recommendations in this report and provide a joint funded package to ensure their implementation.*

Recommendation 6: *All Australian governments have gender equality strategies that address sexual harassment and that recognise sexual harassment is driven by gender inequality and is a form of gender-based violence.*

Recommendation 16: *Amend the Sex Discrimination Act to ensure:*

- a. *the objects include ‘to achieve substantive equality between women and men’*
- b. *sex-based harassment is expressly prohibited*
- c. *creating or facilitating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment on the basis of sex is expressly prohibited*
- d. *the definition of ‘workplace participant’ and ‘workplace’ covers all persons in the world of work, including paid and unpaid workers, and those who are self-employed*
- e. *the current exemption of state public servants is removed.*

Recommendation 17: *Amend the Sex Discrimination Act to introduce a positive duty on all employers to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate sex discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation, as far as possible. In determining whether a measure is reasonable and proportionate, the Act should prescribe the factors that must be considered including, but not limited to:*

- a. *the size of the person's business or operations*
- b. *the nature and circumstances of the person's business or operations*
- c. *the person's resources*
- d. *the person's business and operational priorities*
- e. *the practicability and the cost of the measures*
- f. *all other relevant facts and circumstances.*

Recommendation 34: *The Fair Work Ombudsman and Fair Work Commission, with guidance from the Workplace Sexual Harassment Council, ensure that their staff undertake training and education on the nature, drivers and impacts of sexual harassment to inform their work. Statutory office holders in these jurisdictions should also be supported and encouraged to undertake this training and education.*

Recommendation 40: All Australian governments should:

- a. Ensure that relevant bodies responsible for developing training, programs and resources for judges, magistrates and tribunal members make available education on the nature, drivers and impacts of sexual harassment. This should be trauma-informed and in line with the principles of *Change the Story*.
- b. Support and encourage judicial officers and tribunal members across civil and criminal jurisdictions who may come into contact with victims of sexual harassment to undertake this education and training.

Recommendation 43: The Australian Government:

- a. amend the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 to require public sector organisations to report to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency on its gender equality indicators
- b. fund the Workplace Gender Equality Agency adequately to meet these expanded reporting obligations.

Recommendation 55: Psychosocial support for people affected by workplace sexual harassment be provided through a national network of services, including specialist sexual assault support services, mental health helplines, and healthcare providers with the expertise to respond appropriately to the gendered nature of sexual harassment. All Australian governments should prioritise funding to these services to ensure accessibility and capacity.

In summary:

I have been prompted to write this letter by my frustration and anger at the lack of action on justice and equality for women – particularly the wilfully lazy response to the *Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report (2020)*. We don't need any more reports or inquiries – just implementing the findings of this report will be a big step forward.

Another simple and quick action would be to endorse the amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act brought to Parliament recently.

While the problems are obviously not all the responsibility of Federal Government, these two actions would help to provide the leadership and impetus for changes elsewhere. We need to know that the Federal Government has listened and understands the concerns of Australian women of all political persuasions.

I am taking the following ACTIONS myself:

- Writing to other current Members of Parliament and politicians
- Encouraging family, friends and community to continue to ask for ACTIONS from our MPs (after all it is your job to represent your constituents)
- Continuing to maintain the current momentum for ACTION using social media, community action and personal approaches.

I request that I be updated on progress in any of these or other ACTIONS directed towards to improving conditions and justice for women.

Yours sincerely,

Fran Patterson