

First Minister accepts recommendations on misogyny

The recommendations of the independent report on Misogyny and Criminal Justice in Scotland have been welcomed in principle by the First Minister.

In a parliamentary statement on International Women's Day 2022, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said the report highlighted ways in which the law was currently failing women and girls, and it gave powerful voice to the stark reality of the misogyny faced by women in everyday life.

The First Minister thanked Baroness Kennedy and the working group who produced the report and said Ministers would respond formally as soon as possible, after giving full consideration to the recommendations.

In a statement that reflected on the historic roots of misogyny, the First Minister also made a formal apology to all those accused, convicted, vilified or executed under the Witchcraft Act 1563, on behalf of The Scottish Government.

The First Minister spoke of the the Witchcraft Act saying that it had been consigned to history in Scotland, but it was not yet a historic issue in some parts of the world where, even today, women and girls face persecution and death because they have been accused of witchcraft.

She said deep misogyny that motivated it could still be seen today in Scotland in everyday harassment, online rape threats

and sexual violence.

The First Minister said: "While here in Scotland the Witchcraft Act may have been consigned to history a long time ago, the deep misogyny that motivated it has not. Today it expresses itself, not in claims of witchcraft, but in everyday harassment, online rape threats and sexual violence.

"It is no longer acceptable to expect women and girls to adapt and accommodate. It is time to challenge unacceptable male behaviour, and better protect women from it. We must change for good the culture of misogyny that has normalised such behaviour for far too long.

"It is of course in this context, that Baroness Helena Kennedy's Working Group on Misogyny has this morning published its ground-breaking report.

"Its recommendations are bold and they are far reaching. However, this report, in my view, matters beyond the detail of the specific recommendations it makes. It matters because it acknowledges and it gives powerful voice to the stark realities of everyday life for women.

"It recognises that misogyny is endemic, and that it blights the lives of women every single day. It also recognises the power of the law to drive social and cultural change, and concedes that for women and girls, our law is currently failing.

"Perhaps most importantly of all, it articulates a fundamental truth that on this International Women's Day, we must all reflect on – a society in which women do not feel safe is not one in which we can ever be truly equal."

The Working Group was set up to independently consider how the Scottish criminal justice system deals with misogyny.

This included examining whether there are gaps in the law that

could be addressed by a specific criminal offence to tackle such behaviour.

The group gathered oral and written evidence from a number of experts and stakeholders and from people with lived experience to determine what more we can do to deal with misogynistic conduct.

Justice Secretary Keith Brown will now consider its recommendations of creating a Misogyny Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act containing a public misogynistic harassment offence; an offence of stirring up hatred against women and girls; an offence of issuing threats of, or invoking, rape or sexual assault or disfigurement of women and girls and a new statutory aggravation of misogyny.