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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
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# HOUSE OF LORDS

## OFFICIAL REPORT

*ORDER OF BUSINESS*

Questions	
Women's Refuges .....	923
Equal Pay Legislation .....	925
Education: Gender Equality .....	927
Household Income .....	930
Refugee Crisis: Greece and Turkey	
<i>Statement</i> .....	932
International Women's Day	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i> .....	936

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<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Party/Group</b>
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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# House of Lords

Tuesday 10 March 2020

2.30 pm

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Portsmouth.

## Oaths and Affirmations

2.35 pm

Lord Tomlinson made the solemn affirmation and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

## Women's Refuges

Question

2.37 pm

Asked by **Baroness Donaghy**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the financial sustainability of women's refuges.

**Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con):** My Lords, this Government are committed to ensuring that victims have access to support within domestic abuse safe accommodation, including refuges. After extensive engagement with the sector to ensure sustainable funding, MHCLG is introducing a new duty on local authorities to assess the need and commission support for victims and their children within safe accommodation. Meanwhile, 75 projects across England will share £16.6 million, supporting up to 43,000 victims until this duty comes into force.

**Baroness Donaghy (Lab):** I thank the noble Baroness for her Answer, but the shortage of accommodation in refuges has worsened since I last asked this Question. More than 21,000 referrals to all refuges in England, about 60% of the total, were turned away in 2017-18. That includes women and children. The organisation Refuge has had its accommodation services cut by 50% since 2011 and local authorities are barely able to carry out their essential services. Apart from warm words, what are the Government actually doing to ensure sustainable funding for women's refuges?

**Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist:** I acknowledge the noble Baroness's long-standing huge commitment to this issue, but I believe that her specific concerns will be addressed in the new Domestic Abuse Bill, which includes a duty on local authorities to research and find all the possible outcomes we can give to these victims of abuse. The sustainable funding provided in the Bill will be confirmed in the spending review which we will announce by the summer. In the meantime, we will have this emergency funding until the Bill comes into effect.

**Baroness Boycott (CB):** It is nearly 50 years since I went to the first women's refuge in Chiswick High Road, started by Erin Pizzey. At that point the grim statistics were that 1.5 women a week were killed in the

UK by their partners or their husbands. That figure is now nearer to two per week. This is International Women's Day and I find it unbelievable that over these years the situation is even worse. It is horrific that refuges are closing down. I urge the Government to follow up on the previous point. What systems are in place to help women afterwards and to help children who are orphaned in this awful way? If we put all these women being killed together in one place, there would be a national outcry, yet it never appears on the front pages of newspapers. This crime goes on and on.

**Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist:** The Domestic Abuse Bill will focus on providing new money for refuges. We also provide significant funding for community-based services, because we recognise their importance, including perpetrator programmes and community-based independent domestic violence advocates. Support services for victims of domestic abuse are currently provided through a whole range of organisations, including police and crime commissioners, local authorities, direct government grants and voluntary and community sector organisations. I am very pleased that the designated domestic abuse commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, has agreed to lead an in-depth exploration of the current support landscape in 2021. The former CEO of the charity Standing Together Against Domestic Violence, she said she had no quarrels with this Bill at all.

**Baroness Eaton (Con):** Can my noble friend tell us what we are doing to help men who are in abusive relationships? It is not only women, regrettably, who suffer on such occasions.

**Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist:** My noble friend raises a very good point, because although in three-quarters of domestic abuse-related offences the victim was female, a significant 25% were male. Between April 2018 and March 2019 in England and Wales, 80 females and 16 males were killed by their partner or ex-partner.

There are refuges, or other forms of domestic abuse safe accommodations, dedicated to supporting male victims fleeing domestic abuse, a small number of which were funded under our recent £16.6 million emergency funding round. The new duty on safe accommodation will require authorities to conduct a needs assessment of all victims in their area, and to develop and publish a strategy based on this assessment.

**The Lord Bishop of Portsmouth:** My Lords, I return to the provision available after victims and their children are able to move on from refuges. Substantial, important and fragile ground has been moved and gained through the provisions in this Bill. But the provision after victims leave refuges is very patchy indeed, offered in only one in seven local authorities. Can the Minister say when provision will be available everywhere, for all victims and survivors?

**Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist:** The Bill endeavours to prevent the postcode lottery that has existed for victims of abuse. We are working closely with local authorities, and we have set up a ministerial-led

[BARONESS BLOOMFIELD OF HINTON WALDRIST] national steering group; we will evaluate all the responses to this, including the expansion of community-based services.

**Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD):** As the Minister said, the requirement to provide refuge funding will be included in the Domestic Abuse Bill, and that is extremely welcome. Will the Minister clarify whether refuge facilities will be provided without discrimination to all domestic violence survivors, including children, young people and those with insecure immigration status?

**Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist:** The noble Baroness raises a very good point, because until now people who have not been eligible for public funds have been unable to access entry into these refuges. The Government introduced the destitution domestic violence concession some years ago to support people who could not access any other form of help at this time of crisis. They have now started a review and will publish their overall response to migrant victims of domestic abuse, including those with no recourse to public funds. This review will specifically consider the committee's recommendation to extend the period of time that support is offered for, and how this relates to a victim's ability to access refuge accommodation at all.

**Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Lab):** My Lords, funding to refuges has been ravaged by over a decade of austerity in local government funding. The Communities Secretary has announced some additional funding, but front-line service providers have argued that it will not help tackle the funding gap faced by refuges because it does not provide money that could be spent on day-to-day cost of service provision. Will the Minister ask the Communities Secretary to think again about this provision so that money can be used for day-to-day costs and to increase the allocated budget so that it begins to address the huge shortfalls that have been built up over the past decade?

**Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist:** I welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Wilcox, to her first outing at the Dispatch Box. I will certainly take that back to the department. The whole point of the funding announced by Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State, was to fill the gap that has been built up over the last decade.

## Equal Pay Legislation

### Question

2.45 pm

Asked by **Baroness Prosser**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans, if any, they have to amend the equal pay legislation to include the right to know the pay of a potential comparator.

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con):** My Lords, I welcome the focus the noble Baroness is bringing to this topic as we celebrate 50 years since the introduction of the ground-breaking Equal Pay Act. Equality is good for our society; it unleashes ideas and opportunities

that benefit us all. The Government are using this year to reflect on what remains to be done in this area. My noble friend the Minister for Women will carefully study the proposed right to know as part of this work.

**Baroness Prosser (Lab):** I thank the noble Baroness for that reply. During yesterday's Oral Question on the gender pay gap, a question was asked about a woman's right to know. The Minister agreed that a woman entitled to equal pay should be entitled to know the pay of her prospective comparator. That was good to hear. The Minister said that work is being done in government and that we should have more information on this through the employment Bill. Who are the Government speaking to on this matter? Have they discussed this with the Trades Union Congress, which has huge experience of delicate negotiations? Are they speaking to the Fawcett Society and lawyers experienced in this field? Should the Minister wish to make those arrangements and speak to those people, I would be very happy to help her make the contacts.

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** I thank the noble Baroness. The Government remain unconvinced that the right to know will help. It is a very complex issue, but I understand why she is bringing this forward. As I said, my noble friend the Minister for Women will look carefully at this and study the proposal in the Bill of the noble Baroness this coming year. We will want to talk to all sorts of people. I am sure that will happen, but if a number of noble Lords would like to meet to discuss this further, I am more than happy to do so as we move forward this year.

**Baroness Warsi (Con):** My Lords, my noble friend will agree, as will other noble Lords, that this House fundamentally believes that people should receive equal pay for equal work, irrespective of their gender. She will also be aware that we often find out whether we are being paid equally for equal work only after costly court proceedings when things go wrong. Does she agree that, since 79% of women and 74% of men say that the right to know is a good thing, the Government should take heed of it and make sure that pledges on equal pay for equal work—50 years on from the Equal Pay Act—are met in the forthcoming Bill?

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** I understand that both men and women think that it is a good idea but, practically, it is quite complex for anybody in a workplace to ask a colleague how much they earn. I do not know whether you can make that a statutory duty because it is somebody's right, but this is being looked at and we will come to an agreement on it. We need to wait, look and spend this year deciding what needs to be done on this issue.

**Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD):** My Lords, one fundamental reason why pay discrimination continues to be so prevalent is the lack of pay transparency in our workplaces. Given that eight out of 10 companies pay men more than women, would the Minister back the Fawcett Society campaign and the Equal Pay Bill so that women can have early access to the information they need? If she needs any help with contacting Fawcett, I can help too.

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** The Government are fully aware of the Fawcett Bill that the noble Baroness is bringing forward. I would also say that it is a business's responsibility to ensure, through the Equal Pay Act, that people doing the same work are paid the same. It is its responsibility, not the employee's, to make sure that that is correct.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss (CB):** My Lords, surely the employer should give the information, not a co-worker.

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** The noble and learned Baroness is absolutely right that the employer is responsible for ensuring that its employees who are doing the same job are getting equal pay.

**Lord Cormack (Con):** My Lords, that being the case, why should employers not be obliged to sign the declaration?

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** My Lords, as I said, it is a complex issue, and the Government will be looking into it—

**Noble Lords:** Oh!

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** Yes, it is a complex issue, and the Government will be looking into it over the next year.

**Baroness Lister of Burtsett (Lab):** My Lords, the Minister explained why the right to know may be difficult, but she has not explained why she said that it will not help. Could she explain that now?

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** The issue about it helping is that certain women will not want to ask that question in case they will be at a disadvantage, because they will fear for their jobs and their relationships with their fellow colleagues. Therefore, we need to know from employees and employers what is the best way to make sure that people get equal pay in this country.

**Lord Grade of Yarmouth (Con):** Does my noble friend accept that, if we are to have pay comparisons, it could work the other way round? If somebody is doing the same job as me and is paid a lot more, perhaps their pay should come down rather than mine go up.

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** I am sure my noble friend is correct; it probably could.

## Education: Gender Equality *Question*

2.52 pm

*Asked by Baroness Wilcox of Newport*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to make gender equality education a statutory part of the curriculum.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Department for International Trade (Baroness Berridge) (Con):** My Lords, we want a society where choices and success are not limited by expectations and perceptions about gender. There is already scope within the school curriculum to teach gender equality through literature, history and citizenship. Schools can also organise activities outside the curriculum, such as inviting guest speakers. It was an honour to be invited to Eden Girls' School in London last week to talk about my own experience as a woman in Parliament.

**Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Lab):** My Lords, for the past year, five primary schools in the London Borough of Camden have been participating in a pilot programme created by a non-profit organisation called Lifting Limits. It encouraged school staff to analyse everything they did in the classroom through a gender-equality lens. It took a whole-school approach, with training for staff, sessions with parents and an overhaul of the curriculum, to shift away from almost exclusively looking at white men in areas such as art history and science, as well as making changes to the learning environment. Will the Minister please look at the outcomes of this pilot project and see how these findings can be integrated into the curriculum across England?

**Baroness Berridge:** I am grateful to the noble Baroness for the outline of the pilot project. She is indeed right that there has to be a focus on women being promoted, particularly in the science field, and the national curriculum subject content now includes people like Rosalind Franklin. So, yes, I would be happy to look at the project and give the noble Baroness a response.

**Lord Storey (LD):** My Lords, the Minister will be aware that the introduction of free sanitary products in schools is a major step towards tackling gender inequality in the classroom, but pupils in many schools cannot use the products if their period starts unexpectedly, because their school bans children from using the toilet during lesson times. That can leave children feeling embarrassed or fearful about going to school. Will the Minister look at introducing guidelines for schools?

**Baroness Berridge:** I am grateful to the noble Lord for referring to the welcome initiative of introducing free sanitary products to our schools. I will take back to the department the specific issue he raises in relation to guidelines for head teachers. Obviously, students need to be able to access toilet facilities when they need to.

**Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab):** My Lords, I am slightly surprised to be on my feet when nobody else is. The Minister mentioned the use of literature—and, I assume, other art forms as well—in the teaching and sustaining of ideas of gender equality. Can she give us any examples of works of literature that the curriculum might currently be using or might use in future to underpin that work?

**Baroness Berridge:** In relation to the promotion of gender equality through the use of literature, the subject content for English is not specified in detail in the

[BARONESS BERRIDGE]

curriculum. There are many novels that schools can choose from, and we allow teachers to make those informed professional choices.

**Lord Blunkett (Lab):** My Lords, will the Minister reflect on the experiment outlined this afternoon by my noble friend Lady Wilcox, which I was unaware of, and whether it also includes the really difficult issue of white working class boys, who underachieve in all areas—in science, in humanities and in the arts—and how we can ensure that gender equality stretches to those who may have belligerence but do not have confidence?

**Baroness Berridge:** I am grateful to the noble Lord for raising that issue. Yes, our standards across schools are aimed at raising the aspirations of all groups, and there are a number of projects, from raising professional qualifications to enhancing the skills of schools in disadvantaged areas to ensure that they are able to attract the best teachers. Our information about that cohort, which probably attracts the pupil premium, is that schools are best advised to invest in teacher quality.

**Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab):** Last week, the United Nations Development Programme published its Gender Social Norms Index, an analysis of 75 countries that showed the shocking extent to which there has been a pushback against women's rights globally. It was revealed that 91% of men and even 86% of women hold a bias against women in areas such as politics, education, violence and reproductive health. Of those countries, only six had a majority of the population who held no bias against women—and the UK was not one of them.

So I ask the noble Baroness, both in her role as Education Minister and in her role as Equalities Minister: the United Nations has called on Governments to introduce legislation and policies designed to address ingrained prejudice. Does she really believe that mere guidance, rather than a statutory obligation to teach gender equality, will address that ingrained prejudice?

**Baroness Berridge:** There is, obviously, the Equality Act and the public sector equality duty, so we are not without statutory force in this area. The content of the curriculum is not covered by the Equality Act, but the manner in which it is taught is part of the inclusion framework within Ofsted—so there are tools, including statutory ones, that are used to ensure that our schools are promoting gender equality and breaking down stereotypes, particularly through careers education, even into primary schools now, so that, from the earliest age, children and young people understand that every job is open to them.

**Lord Watts (Lab):** My Lords, it is clear that this policy is not working. What will the Government do more and differently to ensure that this matter is addressed, because it is certainly not working so far?

**Baroness Berridge:** In relation to specific areas where girls have historically not been entering sectors of employment, we are looking at encouraging them.

There is a particular issue around STEM qualifications, so we are working hard to break down those barriers. We have seen a 31% increase in the number of girls taking A-level STEM subjects. I accept that the rate of girls' participation in those subjects is not what we want it to be, but we are also seeing a rise in female STEM undergraduates, so we are going in the right direction.

**Lord Grocott (Lab):** One area of inequality that is very much a matter for this House is the question of hereditary Peers.

**Noble Lords:** Oh!

**Lord Grocott:** The Minister will know that, of the 216 names on the current list of hereditary Peers who are eligible to stand in by-elections, 215 are men. Without being too extreme in these matters, does the Minister think that the Government ought to support any measure—I have one in particular in mind—that would move us towards greater transparency?

**Baroness Berridge:** The noble Lord has had undue success in the ballot for his Private Member's Bill, and your Lordships' House will have time on Friday to discuss those matters.

## Household Income Question

3 pm

Asked by **Baroness Lister of Burtersett**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the Office for National Statistics' release *Average household income, UK: financial year ending 2019*, published on 5 March, and in particular the finding that disposable household income has fallen for the poorest 20 per cent of the population.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Baroness Stedman-Scott) (Con):** My Lords, the Government are giving serious consideration to this important report, as they do to all reports on these key issues. We acknowledge that we need to keep monitoring low incomes; indeed, that is why the DWP will publish the annual households below average income statistics on 26 March. The report referred to by the noble Baroness has a relatively small cohort; the DWP report will have a much larger one and it will be interesting to compare the two. Please understand that we realise that people are struggling, and it is our mission to help them.

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Lab):** My Lords, despite increases in the minimum wage and personal tax allowance, which have a limited impact on poverty—in or out of work—the Office for National Statistics report shows that, over two years, there has been a 7% fall in the real incomes of the poorest fifth of people due to the benefits freeze, spelling an intensification of poverty

and hardship, especially for women and children. The House appreciates the Minister's sympathy but how can the Government she represents, who are supposedly committed to levelling up, justify their continued refusal to make good at least some of the loss due to that freeze in the face of this damning new evidence of the results of their policy choices?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott:** My Lords, we had an intensive debate on this issue last week, which I appreciated, when considering the uprating benefits order. I have given and will continue to give all noble Lords the opportunity to raise their concerns with the Government. I appreciate the warm words the noble Baroness uses to refer to me. I am doing everything I can, as are others, but I am afraid that I do not yet have the currency or the pay grade to answer the question in the way the noble Baroness wants.

**Lord Howell of Guildford (Con):** Does my noble friend agree that one of the heaviest downward pressures on disposable income for the poorest families is the ever-rising cost for households of energy bills? Does she agree that, at a time when primary energy prices are falling around the world and energy is getting cheaper, here in the United Kingdom we seem nevertheless to have the highest energy costs in Europe and the bills keep going up and up, causing particular pressure for single-parent families? Can she assure us that all efforts will be made to mitigate this harsh pressure on such families?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott:** My noble friend makes a very important point. I understand all too well that energy costs are an issue for single parents: my niece is a single parent, and the amount she pays for electric on a key is out of kilter with other methods. My noble friend's point about energy costs is well made. I will go back to the department—they are going to love me when I get back—and then write to him to answer the specifics of his question, placing a copy in the Library.

**Baroness Meacher (CB):** My Lords, the Minister will be aware of the number of universal credit claimants who commit suicide every year, and of course these are the poorest people in our society. What steps will the Government take to improve the administration of universal credit and reduce the huge stress levels involved in trying to make a claim in the way required at the moment?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott:** Suicide is a terrible thing in any circumstances. We have all been reminded recently of its impact on various groups in our society. I can tell the noble Baroness and the whole House that the administration of universal credit is reviewed on a daily basis. We have a terrific director, Neil Couling, who looks after the system, and I know for a fact that he is trying to do everything he can to simplify the process without losing the administrative needs within it.

**Baroness Janke (LD):** My Lords, does the noble Baroness accept that automatic sanctions cause huge stress not only to unemployed people but to working families who are on benefits? What assurances can she

give that work coaches will be given sufficient flexibility to take into account the often appalling and tragic circumstances that lead to this action, and will she reassure those families that they will be listened to?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott:** I can assure the noble Baroness and the House that our work coaches receive regular training and development in respect of sanctions, and that sanctions are a last resort. Recent changes have been made to the length of sanctions and they will be used only when absolutely necessary.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op):** My Lords, some of the people who are suffering the most are pensioners relying on the basic pension. If the coronavirus outbreak gets worse and more and more people are confined to their homes, they will have to rely on the television for information as well as for entertainment, and yet free TV licences are due to be withdrawn on 1 June. Will the Minister go back to her department with all seriousness and compassion and see whether, at the very least, the withdrawal of free TV licences can be postponed?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott:** I can assure the noble Lord that everything I do at this Dispatch Box is done with sincerity and compassion. The point he has raised about television licences is outside my brief, but I will find somebody to talk to about it.

## Refugee Crisis: Greece and Turkey

### Statement

3.07 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con):** My Lords, with the leave of the House, I shall now repeat as a Statement the response to an Urgent Question in the other place regarding the situation at the Turkish-Greek border and the refugee crisis in Greece.

“We are concerned by the situation on the Greece-Turkey border. We should not allow this crisis to detract from the reality that has created it: continued brutal violence, particularly in Idlib, by the Syrian regime and its Russian supporters, which has driven millions of refugees into Turkey and beyond. On 3 March, both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary discussed this with their Turkish counterparts; we have also discussed it with the Greek Foreign Minister. Key to the situation is dialogue, so we welcome President Erdoğan's talks yesterday on the 2016 EU-Turkey migration deal with Council President Michel.

We will continue to support the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal, as it is crucial in effectively managing migratory flows and preventing people risking their lives by attempting to cross the Aegean. At the same time, we recognise Turkey's generosity and the burden of supporting millions of refugees who have fled the civil war in Syria. Both Greece and Turkey face additional challenges as a result of increased migrant flows. We are providing support for their response.

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

In addition to providing humanitarian assistance in Syria, the UK is providing interpreters on the Greek island hotspots and search and rescue operations in the Aegean. We are taking forward a range of capacity-building projects with Turkey's Directorate General of Migration Management, and we are working across government to explore where the UK can provide further support to improve the conditions for migrants, especially the most vulnerable.

As I say, a principal cause of the migration situation is the reckless and brutal nature of the Syrian regime and the Russian offensive in Idlib. The Syria conflict has been one of the most destructive in recent human history, and we want the war to end as quickly as possible. We very much welcome the recent ceasefire between Turkey and Russia, but it cannot stop there. We also continue to support efforts to renew political dialogue in order to bring a lasting end to the Syrian conflict. We support the constitutional committee in Geneva as a first step towards obtaining the peace that the Syrian people so desperately need, and regret that the talks have broken down.

The regime and its backers must now demonstrate commitment to resolving this conflict by engaging in good faith with the constitutional committee and the UN's efforts. Preventing a further worsening of the humanitarian crisis is imperative, and we will do all we can to support those in need while pressing for an end to the Syrian conflict that has impacted so many around the world."

3.10 pm

**Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the Minister for repeating that response to the Urgent Question. In the other place this morning, the Minister highlighted that the UK was one of the largest contributors to the humanitarian effort. The European Commission last week presented an action plan of immediate measures, including the provision of medical equipment, shelters, tents, blankets and other necessary supplies. Can the Minister detail to the House how the UK is working with our European allies to increase the humanitarian effort and to protect the welfare of those at most immediate risk of suffering, exploitation, neglect and abuse? I would be grateful if he could also tell us what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on putting together a comprehensive resettlement plan to share the responsibility for this crisis across the EU and neighbouring countries such as the United Kingdom.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** My Lords, I first thank the noble Lord for his remarks. I am sure I speak for everyone in your Lordships' House—we have all seen the images and pictures from the border—in saying that the situation is deplorable, with desperately vulnerable people seeking refuge and security. I am sure our thoughts are with those who have suffered, particularly those currently on the border. He rightly raises the issue of UK support. Last week the UK announced a new package of £89 million in humanitarian aid to save lives and protect Syrians at increasing risk of violence in Idlib. This includes tents, foods, medical care and, particularly, support for women and girls.

The noble Lord is right to raise the importance of working with key partners across the piece, including the EU. As I said in my Statement, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary has spoken directly with the Greek Foreign Minister and we are working closely with the Turkish authorities, who are crucial in this respect. President Erdoğan is visiting Brussels and the purpose of those meetings is specifically to address this issue; I will update the House accordingly. Last week my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary was in Ankara, where this issue was raised directly with the President of Turkey.

**Baroness Northover (LD):** My Lords, I too thank the Minister for repeating that Answer. The refugees are clearly in the most desperate situation, being bombed out of Syria, pushed out of Turkey and pushed back from Greece. Does he agree that this plays into the hands of people smugglers and is yet another crisis that must be tackled multilaterally?

Speaking of crises that cross borders, neither Turkey nor Syria has yet declared any cases of coronavirus. Does the Minister think this is plausible, given the situation in Iran, and does he agree that refugees and those in the camps will be especially vulnerable to the virus? What analysis is being made of its potential impact?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** Then noble Baroness raises a very valid issue. Indeed, when I was being briefed, that was a specific question. As she will appreciate, the situation is fluid. While immediate medical attention is being provided, there is no exact figure for the numbers who may be caught up in the coronavirus crisis. As she will be aware, part of the issue is that Turkey has closed its border with its near neighbour Iran, for containment reasons. However, a specific assessment of the numbers has not been made. On the wider point raised by the noble Lord, Lord Collins, we of course continue to lead. For the past three years, the UK has been the leading nation, with close to a quarter of the refugees who have taken safe haven across the EU coming to the UK.

**Lord Baker of Dorking (Con):** My Lords, I am sure the Minister is aware that the best cards are held by President Erdoğan, who, I understand, left yesterday's discussions with Europe without any agreement. There are 4 million Syrians in Turkey, and there will be another million if Assad takes Idlib. If that great mass of humanity decides to walk north, as 1 million people did in 2015, there will be an enormous crisis. It would affect us as well, because there would be pressure on the channel ports. If that is the case, I hope the Government will not make comments from the sidelines but will be actively involved in trying to resolve the crisis. Coronavirus will be settled in time, but mass migration on this scale would create problems for generations.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** Those are wise words from my noble friend and I take note of them. He is quite right: I agree that the challenge is not just to comment from the sidelines. That is why we have been proactively engaging; only last week, my right honourable friend met both the Foreign Minister and the President of Turkey regarding Syria.



**Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB):** My Lords, the Minister said that the Government are giving additional funds to Turkey to support the enormous burden it has been bearing. Will British support for that effort by Turkey continue beyond the end of this year, when we are no longer bound, as we are currently, by obligations under European law?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** Having assumed wider responsibilities in DfID, I know that in 2019-20 we allocated £118 million for the crisis in the north-west of Syria. We continue to support that. The noble Lord rightly asked about the continuation of funding. As I said in response to a previous question, the additional £89 million we have announced reflects the changing needs on the ground. We will continue to review the situation and keep in mind whatever support we can extend, be it medical, shelter or support for vulnerable girls and women. That will continue to be a priority for this Government.

**Lord Dubs (Lab):** My Lords, does the Minister agree that the whole world is looking on in shocked horror at people on the Greek-Turkish border being treated as political pawns in the conflict? Will he confirm that, recently, the Greek Government appealed to other countries to share the responsibility for refugees, particularly those who have fled the conflict and arrived on the Greek islands? What has been the British Government's response to that request?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** The noble Lord raises an important point. We have sought to assist, and I have referred to some of the support we have provided directly to Greece, including technical support for the islands impacted by the refugee crisis. We have also called on both Governments to continue their dialogue on this issue. In response to his specific question about taking our share of the burden, the noble Lord will be aware of the announcement of a new resettlement scheme, which will take 5,000 refugees this year.

**Lord Howell of Guildford (Con):** My Lords, this appalling humanitarian problem is not helped at all by the underlying ambiguity of President Erdoğan's position. First, he was buying missiles from the Russians, then he was using these missiles to shoot down Russian aeroplanes; and then he positioned himself vis-à-vis the Kurds, whom we have been supporting and training, as being very violently the other way. Can we not make the point to him that if he wants to be a good member of NATO and an ally, he needs to clarify his position and that of Turkey, which otherwise is causing considerable difficulties, all of which underlie this horrific situation?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** I assure my noble friend that we continue to make the case with our Turkish counterparts. As I said, the Prime Minister has talked directly to the President of Turkey in this respect. Turkey has played a major role in providing support for refugees in this crisis fleeing the conflict zone in Syria, including Kurdish refugees. We continue to make the case for ensuring that the refugees are provided with safety, security and, in the current climate, support for their health needs.

**Baroness Sheehan (LD):** My Lords, the first step to family reunion is to claim asylum. However, the Greek Government have recently decided to suspend all new asylum applications for at least one month. Given that some refugees will want to reunite with family members across Europe, including in the UK, what steps are the Government taking to ensure that children and families may still access their legal right to reunite with loved ones here in the UK?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** The noble Baroness will know that the UK has a proud record of helping vulnerable children and has granted protection to more than 41,000 children since 2010. This will remain a priority. I cannot speak for the Greek Government; I can speak for mine. We have a proud record of preventing and supporting unaccompanied minors. That will remain a priority.

**Lord West of Spithead (Lab):** What diplomatic links do we now have with the Assad regime, and what we have done to try to change these attacks by the Russians and the Syrians on the enclave?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** As the noble Lord will know, we do not have direct dealings with the Assad regime, for the reasons I have often stated from the Dispatch Box. However, as I said in the Statement, we have implored again that the important Geneva negotiations should recommence. In all our interactions, particularly with the Russians, we have stressed the need to bring all parties to the table. Ultimately, this crisis has been the result of the direct actions of the Assad regime in Idlib. It needs to end now.

## International Women's Day

### *Motion to Take Note*

3.21 pm

*Moved by Baroness Berridge*

To move that this House takes note of International Women's Day and the United Kingdom's role in advancing equalities for women everywhere.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Department for International Trade (Baroness Berridge) (Con):** My Lords, it is an honour to begin my role as Minister for Women with a debate on International Women's Day, which I am sure many of us marked in different ways on Sunday. I am also pleased that my noble friend Lord Ranger, of Mayfair, will make his maiden speech in this debate, as male voices are so important to this debate. I congratulate him and welcome him to his place in your Lordships' House.

It is 111 years since the first year in which International Women's Day was marked. I am sure that today we will hear many inspiring examples of women throughout history who have advocated for gender equality, but I also thank the many noble Lords who work tirelessly to improve the lives of women and girls around the world: thank you and please carry on. For our part, this new Government look forward to celebrating

[BARONESS BERRIDGE]

women's achievements, while rolling up our sleeves to tackle the challenges that lie ahead. I want to talk about some of those as we begin our debate.

Many of the most difficult challenges today lie in the damaging attitudes that still exist about what it means to be a boy or a girl, and the idea that people are predisposed to certain roles or skills purely because of their gender. The evidence tells us that those stereotypes can set in at an early age and become much harder to tackle later. We know that even at only nine years of age, girls are less confident than boys in their mathematical abilities. Some would tell us that that is down to innate differences between girls and boys—that girls are less able than boys at maths. But truth be told, results show that females tend to outperform males in maths and science subjects at GCSE. These harmful gender stereotypes can also affect men and boys. New evidence suggests that men and boys are expected to be strong, unemotional and breadwinners, and that these norms can have a significant impact on their social well-being, mental health and quality of life.

Another part of the problem is that women's role in history has long gone unrecognised—in the sciences, for instance, it has been obscured or glossed over—yet there are so many brilliant women, without whose ingenuity and tenacity our lives would be much poorer today: the first ever computer programmer, Ada Lovelace; Marie Curie, for her discovery of radium and polonium, and her huge contribution to finding treatments for cancer, which eventually won her a Nobel Prize; or Rosalind Franklin, a scientist now acknowledged for her work on X-ray diffraction images of DNA, which led to the discovery of the DNA double helix. I am delighted to say that this remarkable woman is now being recognised by the international effort to send a rover to Mars, which is naming its pioneering robot after her, all these years after the Nobel Committee acknowledged only her male colleagues.

This issue is pressing for us today as the demand for STEM skills is growing. The Government are investing in programmes to ensure that girls and boys can succeed on an equal basis, particularly in STEM subjects, to improve representation of women in higher-paying STEM sectors. DfE figures show that between 2010 and 2019 there has been a 31% increase in girls' entries to STEM A-levels in England and a 34% rise in women accepted on to full-time STEM undergraduate courses in the UK. But as things stand, women make up 24% of the core STEM workforce.

This can only be the start, but challenging these stereotypes is essential to level up our country so that everyone has the opportunity to lead their lives as they wish. This year marks 50 years since the introduction of the Equal Pay Act. This landmark legislation was the culmination of years of campaigning by women who chose to take a stand against the injustice of being undervalued, underpaid and overlooked. While the machinists of Dagenham are undoubtedly the most famous, they did not fight alone. I applaud the tenacity of the women bringing forward recent cases, demonstrating that it remains a crucial enforcement tool, empowering women from all walks of life, many in lower-paid roles, to not only secure fair pay but to demand that their work be valued.

To assist similar women we have expanded free childcare for three and four year-olds to 30 hours a week and we have introduced shared parental leave so that parents can share the joy—and, yes, some of the less joyful bits—of their child's early years, because childcare is not just a women's issue: fathers are of course equally responsible for their families. I also acknowledge, as many of us in this House know very well, that the childcaring team often extends far beyond parents and formal childcare arrangements to dedicated, loving armies of aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers and just about every relation in between, so the offer of flexible working should be of great value to them.

As 60% of carers are women, the Government's £6.6 million investment to support carers to remain in or return to work is an important step, and our manifesto shows that we are committed to go further. We will also introduce a dedicated entitlement to leave for unpaid carers of one week per year, to better support carers to balance work and care. A matter of celebration is the current record employment rate for women. It has increased by 37% over the past half-century, from 53% in 1971 to its current record 72.4%, and increases in full-time employment for women have contributed roughly 90% of the increase since these more detailed statistics began to be collected in 1992.

But I want us to be honest that this is not the case for all women. Women from ethnic minority backgrounds have lower employment rates than white women, with the lowest in the British Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnic groups, where fewer than two-fifths of women are employed. That is why we are running mentoring circles around the country, involving national employers offering specialist support to the unemployed, young, ethnic minority jobseeker.

We need to use our sector deals to support women in underrepresented industries, such as the offshore wind sector, which has committed to women being a third of the workforce by 2030. More than 130 aviation and aerospace charter signatories are also giving sustained attention to building a more balanced, fairer industry for women.

The Government are determined to see more women leading UK businesses. If women chose to start and expand businesses at a similar level to that of men, we would add billions of pounds to our economy, so the Government will be taking actions, such as those recommended in the Alison Rose review, and I am encouraged to see examples such as RBS, which recently introduced a £1 billion fund to help women's enterprise.

As well as work, however, we need to ensure that women's rights, safety, freedom and dignity are recognised and respected. This Government are taking action to bring an end to sexual harassment in the workplace, including carrying out the largest ever survey on this topic in the UK so that we can finally understand the true picture of the problem, and design targeted solutions that will work. We have also committed to ensuring protections against third-party harassment; for instance, from customers or suppliers. I know that the vast majority of leaders across the world of work are with us in wanting to root out sexual harassment in the workplace.

Of course, it is not only in the workplace that safety is important. Regrettably, there has been an increase in the number of female victims of homicide over the

past three years, as reported through the Femicide Census. We are determined to tackle this, and I am therefore proud of this Government's commitment to the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill. It will be landmark legislation that tackles an injustice affecting the lives of far too many people.

While we are making progress here in the UK, we have also been blazing a trail internationally. The Prime Minister's first speech set out his ongoing commitment to ensuring that girls across the world have the right to 12 years of quality education, and I am delighted that this will be my noble friend Lady Sugg's first time in a debate in your Lordships' House as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Girls' Education internationally. Noble Lords should bring their domestic concerns to me.

The UK is proud to have a strong track record of championing gender equality and women's rights globally, evidenced by our efforts to uphold sexual and reproductive health rights, the national action plan to end violence against women and girls, DfID's strategic vision for gender equality, and our cross-government global girls' education campaign: Leave No Girl Behind.

The UK can learn a huge amount from other countries. For instance, Rwanda has gone above and beyond its constitutional commitments and has the highest percentage—more than 60%—of female parliamentarians in the world as of the latest elections in 2018. This translates into women holding more than 50% of cabinet positions in Rwanda.

As a woman of faith—the Christian faith—I am very conscious of the role that faith communities can and do play in gender equality. After all, 84% of people around the world self-identify as having a faith. Of course, faith communities can play different roles in different contexts. Some religious institutions and their leaderships can have an inhibiting impact on girls and women and the range of choices they are genuinely able to make, especially when it comes to working outside the home. To my mind, where faith is manipulated in this way, it really is not about faith at all, it is about power and patriarchy. What I see and applaud are the many examples of where faith goes hand in hand with rights, protections and, ultimately, social progress. For example, research funded by the UK Government has shown the incredibly positive roles that faith leaders have played to reduce violence against women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We must not shy away from commending and critiquing the faith dynamic as we work for women's equality at home and abroad.

I conclude by reiterating that I am proud to participate in today's debate with so many staunch advocates of equality for women. I am proud to be part of this Government, and it is an honour to play my part in the work we are doing and will continue to do to fight for equality for women here in the UK and across the world. I beg to move.

3.32 pm

**Baroness Gale (Lab):** My Peers, I thank the Minister for bringing this debate before us today and congratulate her on her new post as Minister for Women and Equalities. I look forward to working with her in future.

This annual debate allows us to discuss all aspects of life for females, and I am sure that we will hear many interesting speeches. I am looking forward to hearing from all Peers, especially the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, who has chosen to make his maiden speech today.

The theme for International Women's Day is "Each for Equality", and the theme of our debate is that the House

"takes note of International Women's Day and the United Kingdom's role in advancing equalities for women everywhere."

That gives us quite wide scope, and poses the question of how each one of us achieves equality. Looking at women in politics, we still have some way to go. Following the general election in December there are now 220 women MPs. That is 34% of all MPs, an all-time high. That compares with this Chamber, where there are 220 women Peers and 587 men. Since 1918, when women could stand for Parliament, only 552 women have been elected, but in the same period more than 5,000 men have been elected. It has taken 102 years to get to this number, and in that time only 46 women have become Cabinet Ministers.

The all-women shortlists legislation that was enacted in 2002 enabled political parties to address the underrepresentation of women in political life. The Labour Party has used it in several general elections, and as a result it has more women MPs than other parties. For the first time, there are also more women than men in the Parliamentary Labour Party.

However, we still need to look at diversity in our elected institutions. Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 requires political parties to report on the diversity of their candidates. That has not yet been enacted. This means that there is no collection of data and no monitoring of party representation at all in terms of disability, ethnicity or gender. Without data there is no way of assessing what the problems are and no way of identifying how political parties can put measures in place to address the problems.

It makes it very difficult to hold parties to account for their attitudes towards diversity. This is a way of ensuring that our elected institutions look like the people they represent, and that is what we should be aiming for. In line with our debate, advancing equalities for women everywhere, will the Minister agree to do all she can to ensure that Section 106 is enacted as soon as possible, because until now the Government—from 2010—have refused to act on this.

Where we have a good number of women elected, such as the Welsh Assembly, we do see a different agenda. For example, much legislation has been passed improving the lives of women and children. The first Children's Commissioner was appointed in Wales and now we have them in Scotland, England and Northern Ireland.

The first Commissioner for Older People in the world was appointed in Wales and there is only one other; in Northern Ireland. The first Future Generations Commissioner was appointed in Wales in 2015, which is working very well. Indeed, we have the Second Reading of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill, promoted by Lord Bird, on Friday. I hope that the Government will be supporting it. Sixteen and 17-year-olds

[BARONESS GALE]

will be allowed to vote for the first time in elections in Wales. This shows that there is a different agenda when there is a good number of women in our elected institutions.

I am pleased to see the Domestic Abuse Bill has started its passage in the House of Commons. It has been a long time coming. The Minister will be aware that, although it has been welcomed by many organisations, they feel that the Bill may be lacking in some areas and there are concerns it does not go far enough. So can the Minister give a guarantee that the Istanbul Convention will be ratified once the Act has been passed and that it fully complies with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, including explicit recognition of the gendered nature of domestic abuse and its disproportionate impact on women, and ensuring the protection of all women without discrimination on any grounds, including race, religion, nationality, or migrant or refugee status. All this has been promised for some time now.

The voice of women's organisations in the United Kingdom was lost to a large extent when the coalition Government in 2010 disbanded the Women's National Commission, although the Government at the time said it would be taken in-house with the Government Equalities Office having the responsibility. However, nothing is now heard about that and the Equalities Office cannot possibly be doing the work that the WNC carried out. Perhaps the Minister could tell the House what is happening in this field. The WNC was an asset to the United Kingdom. It comprised more than 650 women's organisations and provided different Governments over a period of 40 years with a great link to the women of the United Kingdom. It was the voice of women to government. Unfortunately, that voice has been lost.

Are the Government prepared to look at this again and reconsider the decision of the coalition Government? I will be very happy to have any discussions with the Minister and I can assure her it will be most welcome to the women's organisations of the United Kingdom.

We know that women have made advances over the years. We certainly have more opportunities than women of past generations and most of us have the freedom to live our life as we choose. As we mark International Women's Day, I pay tribute to the work of women in the United Kingdom: those who give their time to care for others, such as grandparents who look after their grandchildren, thus allowing their own children to pursue their careers; those who care for sick partners with little financial reward, and whose wonderful work is often barely recognised, certainly by the state; all the women who work for charities, including those who run charity shops, all of whom are volunteers raising money for their charity; women who are involved in their church, doing all sorts of work; and the women we all know in our political parties who make sure that the machine keeps working but who never seek any political reward.

However, I am thinking particularly of two women I know who work in the field of domestic abuse, and I pay tribute to them today. Rachel Williams and Charlotte Kneer have both been victims of domestic abuse over many years, but they have turned their lives around

and now work to help other women who suffer from domestic abuse. Rachel campaigns tirelessly and is committed to ending this abuse. She has four successful petitions on Change.org, with a combined half a million signatures. She is now a qualified independent domestic violence adviser, and she also runs an online awareness Facebook page called Don't Look Back. She has also written a book about her experience. If noble Lords have not read it, it is available in the Lords Library and I recommend it.

Charlotte is now the chief executive of Reigate and Banstead Women's Aid refuge. I have visited it and am in absolute awe of the work that she does, giving women and their children their lives back. She adopts a holistic approach and provides women with the skills they need after suffering years of domestic abuse. Both are strong women and role models, providing support for women going through the trauma of domestic abuse.

Finally, I acknowledge the achievements of the women and girls who went on strike in 1888 at the Bryant & May factory in Bow. The match-girls' strike is considered a key date in the history of trade unionism, as demonstrated by Henry Snell's observation in 1936 that

"the matchgirls' strike had an influence ... which entitles it to be regarded as one of the most important events in the history of labour organisation in any country."

They were such brave women, leading the way for all women to get involved in the trade union movement and improving the lives of many women who worked at that time, as well as all those who followed.

We have made progress. There is still a long way to go and I trust that legislation that this Government will bring before us will go some way towards achieving equality for women everywhere.

3.42 pm

**Baroness Pinnock (LD):** I welcome the noble Baroness to her post. I am sure that she does not need any reminding that there is a lot to do to achieve equality for women everywhere—the theme of our debate today.

Living in poverty—constant, unremitting poverty—is demeaning, life-limiting and soul-destroying. I want to take as my theme for this debate the injustice faced by women in poverty in our own country.

Over 3 million women are carers; one in four women aged between 50 and 64 has a caring responsibility for an older family member; and nearly three-quarters of recipients of the carer's allowance are women, receiving a disgracefully meagre sum of £62.10 a week for caring. Perhaps the Minister would consider whether that is a worthwhile recompense for the role that they carry out. Often, and unsurprisingly, many of these women live in poverty. There are 2.9 million single-parent households in the UK, half of whom live in poverty. They are, overwhelmingly, women. The statistics for women in employment are not that great either. Sixty per cent of those on low pay and 73% of part-time workers are women. Despite all the efforts that have been made, the gender pay gap remains at 18%.

As pensioners, women reap the consequences of their caring responsibilities, which often means taking low-paid jobs and part-time work. Nearly a quarter of

women live in poverty when they become pensioners—and this is in our own country. For many, their life chances are determined by their caring responsibilities. Disproportionately, it is women who take on such responsibilities and who have to live with the consequences of narrow life opportunities. For such women it often means living in poorer quality housing, with the impact that has on health and life expectancy. Women suffer anxiety and depression, wondering how they will be able to make ends meet. Women caring for a vulnerable adult or child wonder when there will be a break from their caring responsibilities. The impact on the children in these straitened circumstances also reduces their life chances compared to the average.

Many in this Chamber will have taken on caring responsibilities for children and, perhaps, later in life for an elderly parent, as I have. These responsibilities, of course, inevitably limit individual freedom of choice, but do not force a lifetime of living in poverty. Why has society accepted that those who care for others may also be condemned to a life of grinding poverty? Why has radical change not occurred?

History often provides clues as to the way in which social change comes about. Sometimes a major shift in public attitudes has been the result of the actions of an individual. Elizabeth Fry was one such person. In the early 19th century, her crusade to improve the plight of women and their children in Newgate prison led to a series of reforms that radically changed society's perception of both prisoners and prisons. Elizabeth Fry had a comfortable early life with parents who were bankers. Rosa Parks had a much poorer start to her life but she too sparked radical change. Her courageous refusal to give up her seat on a bus in Alabama to a white person, as were the rules in 1950s America, inspired the civil rights movement.

The match-girls' strike in 1888 was the collective determination of a small group of girls, most of whom were teenagers. I have the badge to prove it. Part of their job making matches involved dipping the splints into phosphorous. From this practice many of them suffered phossy jaw—a type of bone cancer. Their conditions of work were appalling and their pay lower than even the norm for the time. The success of their strike action was hugely significant. It showed that unskilled workers could unite to improve their working conditions. The match girls were the forerunners of unions for unskilled workers and the laws for workers' rights that followed.

Whether it is collective action—as in the case of the match girls—or individual courage and determination, change is possible. Why, though, has it taken such selfless acts to make change happen? One reason is that all these women were making their mark at a time when men alone were making public policy. Perhaps the strongest argument for diversity of every hue among our decision-makers is that only then is there a much better understanding of the lot of people throughout our society.

Many women who take on caring responsibilities today are not getting the recognition their dedication merits. Can this be the consequence of the gender make-up of our political decision-makers? As we have already heard, only 34% of current MPs are women. In the international league table of women in national

parliaments, the UK is well down in 39th place. The picture is similar in local government, with just 36% of councillors being women and a much smaller proportion in leadership roles. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the lot of women in poverty has not been given the prominence it deserves. Advancing the equality of women everywhere has to include tackling the grave inequality that the women I have described suffer. The question, therefore, in this debate to celebrate the role of women is: who will take up their cause? When will change come for the women in our country who are living in poverty because of what they do to care for others? Perhaps the Minister can give us a response to that big question of our time.

3.51 pm

**Lord Bilimoria (CB):** My Lords, this is the 25th anniversary of the Beijing declaration. Right up front I pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Loomba, who founded the Loomba Foundation for poor widows, initially in India and then around the world. I have been proud to be chair of the advisory council since its inception in 1997. He should also be given credit for securing UN recognition for International Widows Day on 23 June each year. This has done so much to change attitudes and raise awareness for the plight of widows around the world, including educating widows' children. I am so looking forward to the maiden speech of my friend, the noble Lord, Lord Ranger.

I am vice-president of the CBI. Our deputy director-general, Henrietta Jowitt, recently spoke at the Women in Investment Festival and made some excellent points. Basically, she said that diverse companies are better companies. The real argument is not that women need business; business needs women. Companies with more diversity at the top, in their executive teams, actually perform better. At the CBI we hear this from our members time and again. If a business has a more diverse executive team, it is going to be 33% more profitable than other businesses. Evidence suggests that bridging the gender pay gap could boost UK GDP by about £150 billion—more jobs, more investment; a real, material improvement to people's lives.

However, there is a lot of progress still to be made. The Minister mentioned ethnic minorities. The recent Parker review found that only 54 FTSE 250 businesses met the target of having at least one person from an ethnic minority background on their board. In 2017 more than 500 BAME executive were board-ready but that is what we have achieved. How can this be right when nearly 20% of the population of the UK is from an ethnic minority background?

The public are constantly looking to businesses to operate responsibly and sustainably. This is the agenda that our customers, suppliers and clients all expect. Companies are taking steps to close the gender pay gap. EY, the firm that I work with, has EY Reconnect, a returnship programme for people who have had a career break. There is job sharing, the use of technology and collaboration with schools. Tata Consultancy Services has a programme to inspire more women to move into the STEM sector. The CBI has published the *Bridge the Gap* guide, which provides practical advice on how to start conversations about race at work and increase

[LORD BILIMORIA]

disclosure rates to help reduce the ethnic pay gap. In 2018 the CBI's gender pay gap stood at 12.6% mean and 19.7% median.

I am chancellor of the University of Birmingham. In the 1950s my mother studied at the University of Birmingham and every day she went to classes wearing her sari.

The Minister spoke about women outperforming men. Well, 59% of our undergraduates are female and—wait for this—88.7% of female undergraduate students were awarded 2:1s or first-class degrees compared with 83.8% male undergraduate students. Also, 54% of our staff are female. But there is the pay gap—our average hourly pay-rate for women was 19.1% lower mean or 19.6% lower median, although this has decreased. The university has institutional targets to achieve 30% female representation of professors, as well as of senior researchers, senior lecturers and readers. In 2019, 27.5% of our professors and 39.8% of our senior researchers, senior lecturers and readers were female. So, we are working and conducting research on the UN global goals, including goal 5:

“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

When it comes to companies, in 2010, women made up only 12.5% of the members of corporate boards and FTSE 100 companies; this was up from 9.4% in 2004. In 2010, Dame Helena Morrissey, a university contemporary of mine from Cambridge, founded the 30% Club setting a target of 30% women on FTSE 100 boards. We have made a lot of progress on this. We then had the Davies review in 2011, which set a target of 25% female representation by 2015, and now women hold a third of board positions in the UK's top public companies. The latest data shows that one of the two targets set by the Government's Hampton-Alexander review has been hit: women filling 33% of board seats in the top 350 UK listed companies by the end of this year. But the review is struggling to achieve its second main aim of having 33% of women in the leadership teams of firms listed in the FTSE 100 and FTSE 250. The boardroom target has been achieved voluntarily; that is the thing—there has been no legislation on this. However, the Hampton-Alexander review highlighted a lack of female representation in senior leadership and executive roles, with women making up only 15% of FTSE 100 directors.

I am proud to chair the advisory board of the Cambridge Judge Business School. Very sadly, one of our professors, Sucheta Nadkarni, passed away in October 2019. She was a real force at the business school, and director of the Cambridge Wo+Men's Leadership Centre. The centre has done amazing work, including on the Cambridge Rising Women Leaders Programme, which has shown that diversity in senior leadership encourages innovation, improves decision-making, reduces corporate misconduct and improves financial returns. We are witnessing great strides, although there is still so much work to do. Positive progress has been made, with the number of female executives globally set to rise by 36%. This centre has amazing courses that are oversubscribed year after year.

I am also proud to be ambassador for the British Library's Business and IP Centre. We have seen there very clearly that the business landscape in the UK

continues to be dominated by men, with only 20% of businesses nationwide owned by women and fewer than 5% by ethnic minority women. The Minister mentioned the *Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship*, which estimated that if women started and scaled new businesses at the same rate as men, this could add up to £250 billion to the value of the economy. We are doing our best to help all this. However, only 6.6% of women are CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and, globally, we are still battling an average 32% gender pay gap.

India, where I was born, had a woman Prime Minister in Indira Gandhi well before we had Margaret Thatcher over here. Although we have had two Chancellors of the Exchequer, one after the other, who are British Asians—my friends Sajid Javid and Rishi Sunak—India had its first female Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, last year. We are yet to have a female Chancellor of the Exchequer in this country. An American consultancy firm, Korn Ferry, found in its research a few years ago that women outperform men in 11 of 12 key emotional intelligence competencies.

3.58 pm

**Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to welcome my noble friend Lady Berridge to the women's brief in government. I thank her for her introduction to this debate and we wish her well. I am also delighted that she is joined for this debate by my noble friend Lady Sugg, who was marching with me and a good number of Conservatives—and thousands of others, obviously—on Sunday, in the rain, in solidarity with women and girls across the globe, especially those impacted by climate change. I also congratulate my male colleagues who are speaking today: my noble friend Lord Bates, a long-standing champion of women across the globe; my noble friend Lord Shrewsbury, who raised the issue of primogeniture, which may not endear him to all our hereditary colleagues; and my noble friend Lord Ranger, who has supported women in the Conservative Party and elsewhere for many years, including his talented daughter, a local councillor and parliamentary candidate.

Like many other women Peers introduced into the House in the flood of Cameron and Clegg appointments in 2010-11, I made my maiden speech in the International Women's Day debate that year, and I do not think I have missed a year since. It is always an opportunity to look back at highlights and improvements over the previous year—it is often, but not always, two steps forward and one step back. Two years ago, I was able to say that we had a female monarch, Prime Minister, Home Secretary, Leaders of both Houses of Parliament, Scottish First Minister, head of the fire service and head of the Metropolitan Police. As I said then:

“Despite all these great achievements, it feels very fragile, as though it could disappear in a minute.”—[*Official Report*, 8/3/2018; col. 1267.]

Thankfully most, but not all, of the women in these senior positions are still in place, but the achievements still feel fragile.

For me, International Women's Day is also an opportunity to count my blessings—to thank my lucky stars that I was born with the golden lottery ticket

of living in this free and democratic country, with opportunities and a level of equality that women in developing countries can only dream about. I really welcome the Government's emphasis on education for girls in developing countries, which not only changes their lives and their communities, but also enriches their countries. I am sure we will hear more about this from the Minister. I too congratulate her on her recent appointment as Special Envoy for Girls' Education.

As this has been yet another election year, noble Lords will not be surprised that I focus my remarks today to reflect and update the House on where we are with women MPs. When Theresa May and I founded Women2Win in 2005, nearly 15 years ago, she was one of only 17 Conservative women MPs. When she was elected in the Blair landslide of 1997, there were just 13 Conservative women MPs, with 101 women on the Government Benches. That was 9% of the Conservative parliamentary party—or, to put it another way, the Conservative parliamentary party was 91% male. Can we imagine for a moment how that looked? Roll forward two more elections, in 2001 and 2005, and what progress had been made on our side? None. I felt ashamed, embarrassed and annoyed that my party did not seem to think it mattered. We seemed no longer to be the party of women voters, and we certainly were not the party of women MPs. Thankfully, after two strides forward, in 2015 and then again last December, things have improved and we Conservatives are now up to 87 women MPs. The additional 37 are very welcome, especially by the women MPs who until the election were very thinly stretched, resulting, for example, in male Ministers answering debates about the menopause.

Between the 2015 and 2019 elections, there was an increase of 81% in the number of Conservative women MPs. If we can keep that pace up over the next three elections, the job will be done and I can retire and close down Women2Win, which will no longer be needed. Across the House of Commons, numbers are at a record high, with 220 female MPs elected in December, reaching a total of 34%—the highest percentage in either Chamber to date—and moving us up the international rankings. The 50:50 Parliament campaign has played a part, with its #AskHerToStand campaign, as have other stakeholders. However, as we recognise this modest but welcome increase in numbers, we also need to recognise that there is still much to do to normalise women's participation in political life.

I was delighted to host a new event in the Westminster calendar yesterday, launching the first "Women in Westminster: The 100", which celebrates the achievements of and valuable role played by women in public life by recognising 100 high-profile women from the world of Westminster. That focuses not just on MPs and Peers, but on inspirational and talented women from across politics and public service, such as Permanent Secretaries, political journalists, campaigners and activists. In choosing the list, all of us judges were struck by the number of women rising up the ranks across Westminster and in related professions. I hope this list will inspire the next generation of women to begin their journeys, and that we will see many of them featured on that list of 100 in years to come.

4.05 pm

**The Lord Bishop of Gloucester:** My Lords, it is a privilege to participate in this debate, although I am disappointed not to be in New York at the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which was cancelled last week. This event was to celebrate the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, published 25 years ago, which saw countries agree to dedicate themselves unreservedly to addressing constraints and obstacles to gender equality, thus enhancing the empowerment of women and girls all over the world. There is still much to do.

Our Government's commitment to advancing equalities for women and girls worldwide is laudable, and I too want to welcome the new role of the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg. The UK has a strong role to play, not least regarding the vital issue of girls' education. Last year I had the privilege of visiting Egypt with the charity Embrace the Middle East. I visited some inspiring community projects, enabling women and girls—Christian and Muslim—to be educated, not only in literacy but on issues of health, including the prevention of FGM. Girls' access to education is crucial and empowers women and girls to be agents of change in their communities, which benefits everyone.

Women and girls are also agents of peace across our world; again, there are many examples. Last summer I visited a project in Israel, where Jewish and Arab women are working together to produce olive oil and other products. They demonstrate that business and relational concerns enable people, often led by women, to rise above division amid political negotiations.

When we consider advancing equality, it is not only about women achieving positions in institutions designed by and for men, but about wider society being shaped by women's voices and experiences. It is also about men and women working together as equals, with every person having equal value and the opportunity to achieve their full potential; this benefits everyone. This commitment to justice and human becoming is core to Christian belief and faith. However, sadly this is not reflected in the continued prevalence of domestic abuse across our world, here in the UK and, indeed, among people of faith and no faith. It is abhorrent, and I declare an interest as an ambassador of Restored, a charity that campaigns against violence towards women.

Violence against women affects every sphere of life, as we have heard. There are many groups, across different faiths and around the world, committed to gender justice and using their voices to be part of the solution, such as Side by Side, a growing global movement. Just last week, I was delighted to be alongside a passionate group of women—including Nicole Jacobs, the domestic abuse commissioner—at the launch of the Faith and Violence against Women and Girls Coalition, here in the UK. I am looking forward to the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Bill in your Lordships' House, and to constructive discussions about that legislation, including proper intervention support for children of domestic abuse and migrant women. Anyone of any age and in any circumstances suffering domestic abuse deserves appropriate support and a path to safety. Much of what we are talking about today is rooted in women and girls being valued and being able to value themselves.

[THE LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER]

Before I finish, I want to touch on one final area: women in the criminal justice system. A high percentage of these women have experienced some form of abuse themselves. Self-esteem is usually very low, and we know that for many of these women, specific provision in the community—particularly in women's centres—is far more effective in the transformation of lives and reducing crime.

As I have said in your Lordships' House before, I serve as bishop to women's prisons and am president of the Nelson Trust. I welcome the Government's production of a female offender strategy in June 2018, which encouraged trauma-informed and gender-sensitive provision. None the less, the strategy is grossly underfunded and the £5 million of funding for community provision over two years will run out in June. I hope the spending review takes account of the potential financial benefits of community alternatives to custody for women, notwithstanding their effectiveness for rehabilitation and wider society.

As we celebrate International Women's Day, let us celebrate the progress made but not lose sight of the work still to be done. That takes me back to the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* 25 years ago. I look forward now to the maiden speech of the noble Lord, Lord Ranger.

4.10 pm

**Lord Ranger (Con) (Maiden Speech):** My Lords, I speak for the first time in this House with some nervousness but immense pride. I am humbled by the support I have received from noble Lords on all sides of the House. I thank them for their kindness.

I am also indebted to the excellent staff of the House, who are always helpful and kind to me. I am most grateful to my two inspirational sponsors, my noble friends Lord Leigh of Hurley and Lady Vere of Norbiton, for introducing me to the House. I will always endeavour to honour the faith they have placed in me. I acknowledge the guidance and support of my noble friends Lord Howe, Lord Courtown and Lord Smith of Hindhead at every step and, of course, I thank the former Prime Minister the right honourable Theresa May MP, whom I admire and who has bestowed on me this great honour along with the opportunity to serve the people of this great nation.

Last Sunday, on the occasion of International Women's Day, we had a global celebration of women's achievements and today, continuing this most important theme, it is my pleasure to make my maiden speech in this vital debate. I firmly believe that empowerment and equality for women everywhere is a necessity and not a choice. I know this because I owe everything to a remarkable woman: my mother.

For me to be standing among noble Lords is not a dream come true, as I could never have dreamed of being among such illustrious people, knowing where my life's journey began. I owe my success to the British sense of tolerance and fair play. As a result, an ordinary immigrant like me could realise his ambitions and become an asset for his family and adopted country. It is a privilege for me to be British and among those who from these islands have touched the lives of almost everyone in the world.

I was born during the partition of India. We found ourselves on the wrong side of the new border. My father was a visionary and could foretell the consequences of religious disharmony. He was against the partition of India based on religion, as he was a firm believer in a united India free of religious rivalry, with all her people living together in harmony. He said that India's diversity was like the colours of a rainbow; her charm would diminish if one were removed.

Sadly, our father was assassinated at the young age of 42 when trying to save students of a local school who had taken part in a procession opposing the division of India but got caught in communal riots. Our father managed to save the students but lost his life for Hindu-Muslim unity in India. I am a posthumous child; I was born 20 days after the death of our illustrious father.

My life began in a refugee camp in India, without a father but with a remarkable mother. Our mother was widowed at the young age of just 35, with seven children. I was born 20 days later, taking our number to eight, with the oldest being 14. She had lost her country, ancestral home and husband, and whatever could go wrong for her, did. She was told by her family to put us all in an orphanage, as it would be challenging to manage eight of us on her own in a new country without a husband or family wealth. She refused to give up her children and accepted what fate had thrown at her. Luckily, she was educated at a time when many did not teach their girls, and was thus able to gain employment at a local primary school.

Our future would have been very different if our mother had not been educated. She brought us up through immense difficulties. Her words to us were, "You may starve, but you will study". The result: five of her sons became commissioned officers in the Indian Army, and she received the title of the "Proudest Indian Mother" for having her sons serve in the defence of India.

I am most proud to have established businesses which have won six Queen's Awards for Enterprise in International Trade, five of them consecutively: an unprecedented achievement. My companies sustain thousands of British jobs through their export activities and have connected Britain through trade with over 100 countries.

It is unfortunate that even today, we live in a world where there is not full gender equality. In many parts of the world, women are still prevented from studying or going to work. I say, "Those who do not treat women as equals become unequal themselves in the world". Even though there are laws preventing gender inequality, there is still a gender pay gap that persists in the UK and across the globe. Why is it that women in many countries are worse off than men in terms of jobs and education? Women probably work harder and longer hours than men. More importantly, as my life shows, if a husband dies prematurely as my father did, he may leave behind a woman who is unable to deal with our uncaring world, and a mother who is unable to provide for her children. My mother's resilience and ability shaped the lives of eight children, 19 grandchildren and 27 great-grandchildren.

Educating girls is not just good for the girl; it also marks the end of poverty for her family, her children, her community and eventually her country. We must



not underestimate the power of educated girls, as what they experience themselves they can impart to their children. As a Member of this noble House, I pledge my time and resources to support eradicating the mistreatment and gender inequality suffered by women across the globe. I pay tribute to vital initiatives such as International Women's Day, which helps to highlight the achievements of women across the world as well as the challenges they face.

Finally, I would like to thank the three wonderful women who shaped my destiny: first, my mother, who never gave up and never gave in, no matter what fate threw at her. She could easily have abandoned us and remarried, as she was young, intelligent and beautiful, but she dedicated her life to her children and made each of us an asset to society. She also instilled in us the right values, which became the bedrock of our success. Secondly, I thank my beautiful, intelligent, educated and hard-working wife, who has always stood by me. She worked for the MoD and HMRC, and with her financial help we could offer the best education to our three beautiful daughters. She has been the bedrock of my success. Our eldest daughter is Councillor Reena Ranger OBE, who also runs an organisation dedicated to empowering women. Our second daughter is an accomplished NHS doctor who has completed her research in haematology. Our youngest daughter is a scholarship holder from LSE who worked for Google and PwC before joining one of our companies, and who has become an integral part of its success. Thirdly, I thank the former Prime Minister, the right honourable Theresa May, who ennobled me in her resignation honours list. Without the support of these wonderful women, I would not be standing here today as a proud man.

Let my life's story always remind you of the strength of women. In the words of Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh faith:

"From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived; to woman he is engaged and married ... When his woman dies, he seeks another woman; to woman he is bound. So why consider her inferior? From her, Kings and Prophets are born ... without woman, there would be no one at all."

I thank noble Lords for being part of my maiden speech.

4.19 pm

**Baroness Rock (Con):** My Lords, it is, as ever, a great privilege to contribute to this important International Women's Day debate, and I add my profound thanks to my noble friend Lady Berridge.

It is also a great honour to follow the maiden speech of my noble friend Lord Ranger and to hear about his extraordinary journey and, in particular, his remarkable, resilient and resourceful mother. He is indeed lucky that he is surrounded by so many talented and strong women. He brings a wealth of award-winning business experience, and we all look forward to his future contributions.

We are in the fourth industrial revolution. It has been described as more rapid than the technological changes of the first three. Indeed, it will fundamentally change the way we live and the way we work, alter our perceptions of value and even make us question what it means to be human. It is the most profound change which the human race has yet witnessed.

On this day in this debate, my point is simple. The fourth industrial revolution must, unlike the first three, be driven and delivered by both men and women. Consider today's economy. Yesterday's industrial titans have been replaced with IT-driven businesses in, first, hardware, then software. Now, they have been superseded by data-driven businesses: companies that draw their strength from the accumulation and capture of data and their ability to monetise it with AI and machine learning.

From both my roles as a board member of the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation and the House of Lords AI Select Committee, on which I was privileged to serve, I have seen the power of the new business models, but I also see the implications for society if they are not governed, regulated and delivered in a gender-balanced way. Here, I focus in particular on gender-bias in algorithmic decision-making. Take recruitment. Artificial intelligence can screen CVs based on data from previously successful and unsuccessful candidates. But what if that data was drawn from criteria we would now consider unacceptable? We would end up with recruitment practices that perpetuate what is now accepted as gender bias.

What can we do about it? Our findings from the Lords AI Select Committee were simple. If we want more gender-neutral outcomes from our algorithms, we need more gender-neutral inputs. In other words, we need more women coders, programmers, data scientists and analysts. We need more women in tech. This needs to happen now. It needs to happen before more data-driven technology businesses build huge data lakes and create products and services that discriminate against women and minorities—even if it is inadvertent.

It will be a challenge. Statistics from PwC's Women in Tech programme state that just 3% of women are considering a career in tech, 78% cannot name a famous woman in tech and only 5% of leadership positions in tech are held by women. In engineering, the Royal Academy of Engineering's latest gender pay gap report states that there is a serious diversity deficit, with a workforce that is still only 12% female.

How do we address this? Technology is not a niche sector: it is everywhere and will change everything. But technology can be a force for good only if it is fair, transparent and equitable. Yes, opportunities abound, but only if we build the right foundations, and women must be part of that.

Last year, I was fortunate to address the inspiring Women in Data UK organisation: more than 1,200 women who recognise not only the profound opportunity of the data economy but the essential opportunity that women have to be an integral part of it. They want analytics and diversity to be top of the agenda, and they are using case studies and mentorship to encourage and enable more women to pursue careers in data science. There are currently four male data scientists to every one woman.

Imagine how much more we can achieve if we work together, and how much more we can achieve with education and mentorship. There is sound economic justification for increasing female participation at every level in every industry, and there is a moral and societal obligation to ensure that the world of data

[BARONESS ROCK]

science has proportional representation. It is imperative that children at every level of education cultivate an interest in STEM. To do this, we must demonstrate how STEM can empower girls, women and gender-diverse individuals to be agents of change.

I commend the steps that the Government have taken in providing funding for 2,500 AI and data science conversion degrees, with 1,000 of them scholarships for people from underrepresented groups. There is £5 million to drive innovation in adult learning and £13.5 million for new master's conversion courses and scholarships at academic institutions. Whether it is girls in school or women looking at a career change or professional development, the opportunities are emerging.

Encouragingly, academic institutions are similarly responding to the challenge. I commend the contribution and ambition of Edinburgh University in this important field. It has a target of 100,000 individuals to be certified in data science-related subjects in the next decade—and this is just part of what is happening at one institution. The UK is leveraging its leading position in academia to stay ahead in data, AI and other emerging technologies.

We must celebrate the role of women in the economy and society, but we must also recognise that we have more to do. As the pace of change accelerates, we must embrace the challenges and the opportunities. Data and AI's time has come and women have a vital role to play. If we act now, we can achieve it.

4.27 pm

**Baroness Bryan of Partick (Lab):** My Peers—following my noble friend Lady Gale's innovation for a new way of addressing ourselves—I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, on a truly remarkable maiden speech, especially on his veneration of his parents, particularly his mother. I am sure that he will make a great contribution to this House.

I had my speech ready on Saturday—that is well prepared for me. It drew on the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. Then, on Sunday, I travelled down to the small town of Spennymoor in County Durham to the unveiling of a very special new banner created by the Women's Banner Group to honour influential women and the campaigns that they were involved in. Everyone featured was nominated by women from the Durham coalfield area. I was there because one of the women shown on the banner, Pat McIntyre, was a friend of mine for many decades. After an afternoon listening to stories of the women depicted and the campaigns that they worked on, I thought that the banner had more to say about women's solidarity than any report or list of statistics.

Probably the most well-known person included on the banner was Ruth First. Her link to County Durham came when she was in exile from South Africa. While teaching at Durham University, she supported the anti-apartheid campaign and was active in the women's liberation struggles of the 1970s. I am sure that many noble Lords will have read her book, *117 Days*, describing her very cruel imprisonment in solitary confinement even though she had never been convicted of a crime. While working in Mozambique on secondment from Durham, she was brutally murdered by the South African

Police using a letter bomb. The British Government of that time failed to notice who the real terrorists were in South Africa.

My friend Pat McIntyre knew Ruth and was inspired by her. Pat was already involved in fighting for women's rights and was active in international solidarity movements. In 1986 she went to Chile as part of the support for the women struggling there. She joined the International Women's Day march which was made up of women and children. Mounted police charged the demonstration and the women were tear-gassed. Pat was helped by Joan Jara, whose husband Victor had been brutally beaten and murdered by the Pinochet regime. Victor Jara was the country's most popular singer and poet. It seemed as if Pinochet had a particular dislike of poets. Chile was another example of when the British Government failed to acknowledge who the real terrorists were.

One of the campaigns depicted on the banner is Women Against Pit Closures. Betty Cook and Anne Scargill were there on Sunday. Betty spoke of the links their campaign had made with women around the world, including American women miners. During the strike, women from the campaign were often picked up by the police. When this happened to Betty and Anne the police tried to intimidate them by asking them to take their clothes off. Those officers obviously had little experience of women from Barnsley. After the strike, the pit villages were often left to rot while women tried to hold their communities together. The Government of the day thought that they were part of the enemy within.

Other campaigns are shown on the banner: women from County Durham had been at Greenham Common, were supporters of CND, and are now involved in the WASPI women's fight. This beautiful silk banner will join the Big Meeting to be held in Durham in July. It will have pride of place on the march through Durham and many hundreds of women will walk behind it. Memorials to women, many of whom are largely unrecognised, help us to remember and learn from our history. That is why I join others today in supporting the campaign for a memorial to the match-girls' strike.

I turn back to the *Global Gender Gap Report*, because I do not want to waste the hours I spent looking at it. It benchmarks countries on gender parity and reveals that since last year, the UK has dropped six places to 21 and has been overtaken by Albania, among others. The report places Nicaragua in fifth place after only Iceland and the Scandinavian countries. It also shows that our long-term trading partner Saudi Arabia is down at 146th out of 153 states. While the Saudi ruling elite has allowed some relaxation in the laws about women driving cars, the women who campaigned for that change are still in prison and being held in solitary confinement.

Rather than posing this debate as a congratulation to the UK on its role in advancing equalities for women everywhere, we should be congratulating the work done by women across the world in fighting for their own rights as well as those of their daughters and granddaughters. "Each for equal" must mean that, until we all have equality, none of us is truly equal. Above all else, it is about solidarity. Sometimes our sisters will be depicted as terrorists and enemies when

all they are doing is fighting for human rights. The UK under both party leaderships has sometimes been on the wrong side of history. I hope that the Government will recognise this and ensure that they always stand in solidarity with oppressed people rather than siding with the oppressors.

4.34 pm

**Lord Razzall (LD):** My Lords, I feel both proud and disappointed—proud to be participating in this extremely important debate and disappointed that more of my sex have not seen fit to participate. As the Minister said at the beginning, if we are to talk or do things about equality for women, men have just as much a role to play as women.

There is no doubt that since I was born there has been progress in the role of women in the three significant activities of my life—first, in legal education and the practice of law. I did not go to Cambridge University, but many people may be surprised to realise that only in 1947, when I was four years old, were women admitted as full members of the university for the first time. I went to Oxford. When I went in the 1960s, with few exceptions—I think there were four all-female colleges—the colleges were all male. I read law there. Of the 200 students who read law at the same time as me across the university, only five were women—including the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, who unfortunately is not in her place today. Now, of course, all colleges at Oxford are mixed and there will be equal numbers of men and women reading law. I then joined a law firm that had been founded in the mid-18th century and had had no women partners at all. It had never had a woman partner from 1750 when the firm was founded to 1966 when I joined it. By the time I left, 25 years later, there were a significant number of women partners.

In the second area of my life, politics, there has clearly been a sea change in women MPs, as everybody has said. When I was born in 1943, there were only 13 women MPs; there are 220 today. Until the 1958 legislation to create life peerages, there were in your Lordships' House only a handful of Scottish women Peers. Of course, the 1958 legislation was violently opposed at the time by members of your Lordships' House. Indeed, the father of a colleague of mine, who had better remain nameless, said:

“This is a House of men, a House of Lords. We do not wish it to become a House of Lords and Ladies.”—[*Official Report*, 31/10/1957; col. 690.]

Fortunately, Harold Macmillan took no notice of that at the time and the legislation was passed. The success of that, as far as women is concerned, reminds one—looking around this Chamber—of Christopher Wren's plaque in St Paul's Cathedral: “Si monumentum requiris, circumspecte.”

The third area of my life has been cricket, where there have been very significant changes. After a lengthy campaign, there are now women members of the MCC. I see the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, grinning at that. The rise in the popularity of international women's cricket would have delighted Lady Rachael Heyhoe Flint, who sadly is no longer with us. The success of women's cricket is shown by the fact that you are much more likely to hear an international woman cricketer interviewed on the “Today” programme than you are to hear a government Minister.

But this is no time for complacency. As one of the noble Baronesses said, we are only 39th in our proportion of women Members of Parliament. It is quite surprising, as someone indicated, that Rwanda is first and the next four are Cuba, Bolivia, the UAE and Mexico. If we look at the role of women throughout the world, the statistics are shocking. An estimated 303,000 women worldwide die in childbirth or during pregnancy every year; the UN says that on average women earn 24% less than men; one woman in three is a victim of sexual or physical violence; only 48 women have been awarded Nobel prizes, and 822 men; and it is calculated that one woman in four alive today was a child bride.

The outlook, however, is not all bleak. I do not always agree with Boris Johnson, but I was impressed that when asked to choose the five women he most admired, one of them was Malala Yousafzai—the girl who was shot when campaigning for education and is now studying PPE at Oxford. Along with many noble Lords, I welcome the appointment of the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, to be at the forefront of promoting girls' education throughout the world—more power to her elbow.

4.40 pm

**Baroness Bull (CB):** My Lords, it is always an honour to speak in this Chamber, but never more so than in this annual debate, among a roster of inspiring noble Baronesses, and indeed some noble Lords. I join others in congratulating the Minister on her new role, and the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, on his maiden speech.

I will speak to one of the six missions associated with this year's theme, #EachforEqual: the mission to increase the visibility of women creatives. Given the many types of discrimination that women face, Members of your Lordships' House may well ask why this particular mission matters. They might imagine, as many do, that the creative industries are genuinely meritocratic, with women accessing the same opportunities as men. Unfortunately, research proves this not to be true.

Across the nine sectors of the UK's creative industries, the workforce is deeply unequal. The usual factors underpinning gender inequality are at play, as they are across society, but there are key structures of the cultural labour market that shape the life decisions of women in the workforce, and they impact particularly on women of colour and women from working-class backgrounds. Women are present, of course, but in areas such as theatre, publishing and museums they are largely absent from high-profile positions. In television and film, the lack of women is striking. According to the British Film Institute, among the 11,000 credits for directors of British films over 100 years, just 5% were women.

It would be easy to focus on motherhood as a reason why women drop out of the creative workforce. It may be a factor, but it is not the whole story. In too many parts of the creative economy, there is a pervasive sexism at work. This is not all on the scale of the high-profile sexual harassment cases that sparked the worldwide #MeToo movement, but rather a series of ongoing micro-discriminations that see women given lower status, while senior roles are assumed to be the work of men. This can leave women uncredited, or excluded from the creative process, and see women

[BARONESS BULL]  
labelled as “risky”—not just because they might leave to have children but because of a persistent industry assumption that men, and male-led stories, make for better box office.

Underpinning these biases is a set of structures that disadvantage women: unpaid internships, temporary contracts and jobs offering low, or even no, pay. Working hours are long and unpredictable, with evening events the norm. The importance of networks and connections in accessing job opportunities in a sector that tends to favour informal hiring practices means additional socialising, outside office hours. These are challenges for workers of all genders, but when they interact with sexist assumptions, or when women try to combine caring responsibilities with work, they present greater barriers to women than to men. It is hard to disentangle these biases and structures because each reinforces the other.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that women leave the sector early, or that they are far less likely to climb the ladder to leadership positions. The situation is better in the not-for-profit sector, where 53% of the UK’s museums and galleries are led by women. But this optimistic statistic hides further evidence of inequality: the higher the annual turnover of the organisation, the less likely it is to be female led. In London, in 2018, 75% of organisations receiving over £1 million in funding had male directors at the helm.

These depictions of the cultural workforce go beyond questions of inequality to reflect enduring struggles over value and worth. In this, the creative industries are simply a microcosm of society as a whole, which still values women’s labour at a lower rate than men’s.

Your Lordships will be glad to hear that there is some cause for celebration as we mark International Women’s Day this year. Recent analysis by the policy and evidence centre of media reporting of women in the creative industries found that since 2013, references to females had risen to 40%. This means that the amount of space given to women in the media now exceeds the proportion of women actually working in the creative industries.

However, like all silver linings, there is a cloud attached. The media reports placed much more focus on the sounds made by women, such as laughs, cries, giggles, even coos, or non-verbal reactions, such as smiles, grins and nods. Words that imply creative achievements and leadership roles, such as “directed”, “performed”, “designed”, or “managed”, “founded” and “launched” were more likely to refer to men. When *Hansard* reports this speech, it may be tempted to add here, in quotation marks, “she sighed”.

I chose to speak about gender inequality in the creative industries today for two reasons: to highlight the structural issues and biases that disadvantage women creatives, and to highlight the consequences of this beyond the demographics of the sector. Films, television, books, theatre, music and art are there to tell us who we are, and if the workforce is skewed, the message is skewed. Women have important perspectives to bring and narratives to share, and if their voices are missing, a whole range of stories and experiences are excluded from cultural representation. That matters, because representation matters.

Women in the creative industries are empowering and inspiring not only the next generation of female creatives but the next generation of women. I hope that everyone will join me today in committing to celebrate them and their achievements, not just on International Women’s Day, but every day throughout the year.

4.46 pm

**Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone (Con):** My Lords, as always it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Bull, whom I knew when she was just dancing, all those years ago when I was Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. What a wonderful person she has now become in areas other than the ballet.

This is a splendid debate in which many of us enjoy participating as year follows year. Like the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester, I will begin with the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. At the time I was in the Cabinet: I think I was the ninth woman in a British Cabinet. My noble friend Lady Chalker went to Beijing as our representative. I worked closely with her; she had been the Secretary of State for International Development. We talked hugely about health, education and literacy, and their importance not only in the UK but around the world. It was of course the first UN event at which intergovernmental organisations and activists agreed a comprehensive plan to strive towards global gender equality. The Beijing Declaration was widely recognised as a substantive, pioneering, progressive plan for advancing women’s rights, covering 12 key areas, including women in power and decision-making, women and the economy and violence against women.

How far we have come in 25 years. In 1995, women held fewer than 10% of the seats in the House of Commons. Now—after a record 220 were elected in the last general election—women hold 34% of the seats. Let me pay a wholesome tribute to my noble friend Lady Jenkin, who has been a force in this area. I told her that she should become a Member of Parliament in her own right. She would not take my advice, but she has been a force-multiplier by encouraging so many others to come forward.

Internationally, the proportion of female parliamentarians has risen from 11% to 24% or 25%. In 1995, seven UN member states still denied women equal voting rights. Since Saudi Arabia changed its electoral rules in 2015, gendered voting has ended in all countries. In his magnificent maiden speech, my noble friend Lord Ranger reminded us of parts of the world where there is still a great deal of disparity and all is not fine. If one message came forth from the Beijing conference, it was that human rights are women’s rights, and women’s rights are human rights.

Now we have moved forward not only to rights but to a sense of empowerment and fulfilment for women. In 1995, there had never been a female chair or chief executive of a FTSE 100 company. Now women hold 32.4% of FTSE 100 board roles, as the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, was saying, according to the latest Hampton-Alexander Review. This is extraordinary. In 2000, I became a board member of AkzoNobel and every board meeting started with, “Gentlemen

and Lady”, because women were an endangered species. There has been a transformation in opportunities for women.

With many challenges remaining, it is essential that we work to close the many other aspects of the gender gap. The noble Baronesses, Lady Pinnock and Lady Gale, talked about some of the disadvantaged women—carers and volunteers and those on very low incomes. It is so easy in this debate to move between talking about elite FTSE 100 chief executive board members and then remember the work that so many women in society do with few rights, little remuneration and often far too little credit. I want to get that balance right.

While female parliamentary representation has more than doubled since 1995, three countries still have no women in their unicameral or lower chamber and 26 have fewer than 10%, including Japan, Qatar and our fellow Commonwealth realm of Belize. There are also regional discrepancies, with the Americas and Europe above 30% and MENA and the Pacific below 20%. There are other areas of the gender gap, many of which have been mentioned, including education, the pay gap, reproductive and health rights, sexual harassment, maternal health, gender-based violence, child marriage and the danger of populist movements actually undermining the progress that has been developed in promoting female rights. The Institute of Development Studies has recently written about that.

I want to reinforce the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, about the huge success of the 2011 review of the noble Lord, Lord Davies, followed by the Hampton-Alexander Review. I pay great credit to Denise Wilson, who I am pleased to tell noble Lords is a graduate of the University of Hull—about which more in a moment. She is the chief executive of this great programme, working closely with Cranfield University which, each year, identifies the number of boards with one woman or no women so that a massive programme of naming and shaming can develop. A vast amount of research has been done. McKinsey and all the professional services firms, including Lloyds Bank and a great number of companies, have given serious evidence. Unlike other countries that we sometimes compare ourselves with, the programme now consists of 350 companies, with about 23,000 people are under consideration. As we know, there has been massive progress on the non-executive side, but we are still slower on the executive development of women. This is all about role models, unconscious prejudice, childcare and expectations. We have the toolbox, but we now have to develop the people.

McKinsey described the effect of people leaving during their early corporate careers as the “broken rung” of the corporate ladder. Women are the majority of graduates and account for 48% of entry-level hires, but only 38% of first-level managers. I am sure that they should all become data scientists and tech experts, as we have been rightly reminded.

Leaping on to higher education, when I became Chancellor of the University of Hull in 2006, only 12% of vice-chancellors were women. This is very interesting. It is often because they do not peacock enough. Men talk about their work all the time, but women diligently slave through. All credit to the Athena SWAN programme. I would appreciate the Minister

telling us what more is being done to develop and modernise it. We appointed our first female vice-chancellor, Professor Susan Lea, in 2017. By 2019, just under 30% of vice-chancellors are women.

My last small comment is that there is a danger of us regarding the feminist debate in terms of elitism and the success of women with a certain interest and background. We should have regard to intersectional feminism—the overplay of race, religion, orientation and social class—to be sure that we are not developing a form of feminism that is somewhat self-serving. We need to make sure that we are looking after the interests of women and girls everywhere, including those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

4.54 pm

**Baroness Donaghy (Lab):** My Lords, I am very pleased that the noble Baronesses, Lady Berridge and Lady Sugg, are topping and tailing this debate. They have the respect of the House, and they always give thoughtful and intelligent replies to our questions. We know that they have important work to do.

I thought I would go back to basics. I drew up a shortlist of the three things that might impact on the largest number of women. I thought about reopening Sure Start centres, because I thought that would help a lot of women, and that we should improve pain management in childbirth, because too many women have a shattering experience, which should not happen in this day and age. However, my final three things are the menopause, women as carers and the importance of having a social care policy. I think they would improve the lives of hundreds of thousands, not just tens of thousands, of women because they would help them not only as carers but as care home workers—if they were better paid, that is—and care home residents.

On the menopause, my thanks are due to Dorothy Byrne, head of news and current affairs at Channel 4, who helped to introduce a policy on supporting women through the menopause at work; Diane Danzebrink, the founder of the not-for-profit organisation [menopausesupport.co.uk](http://menopausesupport.co.uk); Helen Carroll, who wrote the centrepiece spread on the menopause in the *Daily Mail* last month; and one man, consultant gynaecologist Haitham Hamoda, chair of the British Menopause Society.

Between the ages of 45 and 55, one-quarter of women consider leaving the workforce because of exhaustion, hot flushes—I hate that phrase and wish there was a better one; I suggest “loss of personal central heating control”, but I am sure there is a better phrase—mood swings, aching bones and what some people call brain fog, when someone is unable to recall facts they have known for years. One woman’s symptoms were so severe that she thought she had early-onset dementia. It was only when she left her job as a result of her fear of not being in control and her GP diagnosed her symptoms and prescribed HRT that she realised that she was not suffering from dementia. She had experienced an early menopause, which was not picked up because she was on the contraceptive pill. That can often happen.

Some women consider suicide. Suicide is most common in women in the decade between the ages of 45 and 55. Eight in every 100,000 women take their own life

[BARONESS DONAGHY]

between those ages. HRT can help, but it is estimated that only 1 million women are on HRT, although there are 4.3 million women aged 50 and over in the workforce. HRT was much more readily available until research in 2003 linked its use with an increased risk of breast cancer. Trainee doctors are given minimal training about the menopause and are more likely to consider the risks of HRT than the benefits. If women are to have a better experience during the menopause, it is vital that doctors are trained to understand the full picture, to advise accordingly and to involve women in decision-making.

Employers should ensure that they have adequate policies to recognise that some women need support, not just to stay in work but to get promotion. Women going through the menopause often lose their confidence at the very time in their career when they need it most. My advice to employers, and not just because they want to retain the best talent, is that there could be consequences at employment tribunals. In 2018, a tribunal ruled that a woman had been unfairly dismissed and that her employer discriminated against her due to her protected characteristic of the menopause. Supportive policies at work, better training for doctors and the ability to have a conversation with employers without fear of losing one's job would all help 18 million women.

My second point concerns recognising the role of carers in society. This has been championed over many years by my noble friend Lady Pitkeathley and I can do no better than refer the noble Lords to her excellent contributions. My noble friend Lady Drake has championed kinship carers and the importance of incorporating pension rights for carers. Only last week, in Committee on the Pensions Schemes Bill, she outlined the history of government failure to support consistently the pension rights of carers. First, they are in, then they are out. It is time this hokey-cokey came to an end. If anyone has not had the chance to read my noble friend Lady Drake's speech from last week, I urge them to do so. It is from 4 March 2020, cols. 329-33.

Finally, the Government announced that they were going to get social care done. This would help women who care for elderly relatives, women in care homes and women who work in care homes, who earn shocking levels of pay while displaying the humanity, skills and emotional support that should gain them immediate entry under the Government's proposed immigration system. Now we hear that the Government are going out to consultation in May to get some cross-party support. We have been here before. The ideas are there, the research is there and the reports are there. I can practically feel my noble friend Lady Pitkeathley and the noble Lord, Lord Warner, hovering over the Chamber. Social care is in crisis and too many women are living in quiet desperation. Actually delivering on this promise would be a real act for women's liberation.

5.01 pm

**Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen (Con):** It is always an honour to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, and listen to her wise words, many of which she has given to me over the past few years when I have been floundering around on the Front Bench.

I thank both my noble friends the Ministers for today's debate and congratulate my noble friend Lady Berridge on her new appointment and my noble friend Lady Sugg on her appointment as Special Envoy for Girls' Education. It is a brilliant appointment and one that means girls' voices will be heard across the world. I also welcome my noble friend Lord Ranger to this House; following his maiden speech, we look forward to his contributions in the future.

I want to talk briefly on some of the issues facing women in our rural communities in the UK. The view that people living in the countryside are well off and enjoy a rural idyll masks the reality of pockets of deprivation, loneliness and ill health and the feeling of exclusion, due in main to the scarcity of transport, internet, local nurseries and schools, affordable housing, health services, training and secure, well-paid work.

Loneliness and the feeling of isolation are often seen as affecting mainly the elderly, but this is not necessarily true. According to the Campaign to End Loneliness, the under-25s are as vulnerable as the over-65s. For a young graduate or single mum, stranded in a location without transport, with no relatives or friends close by, it is easy to see how this can lead to isolation, causing depression, anxiety and other mental health problems, and to limiting their wider opportunities.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester and the noble Baroness, Lady Gale, talked about domestic abuse. A report by the National Rural Crime Network published last year stated that women living in rural communities and enduring domestic abuse are half as likely to report their suffering, while the perpetrators are, as we know, shielded by the isolation of the countryside. Abusers are able to isolate their victims with financial control and removal from friends and relatives. The report says that the availability of public services in rural areas more generally is on the decline, limiting support networks and escape routes for victims. Therefore, I was pleased to hear my noble friend the Minister mention in her opening remarks that the Domestic Abuse Bill will be coming forward and will help this vulnerable group of women.

As the Minister mentioned in her opening speech, rural BME women can find themselves particularly marginalised. Many of these women live in small towns and villages, and language, cultural differences and racism can make their problems worse. They have difficulty in accessing support networks, leading to loneliness and isolation because of a lack of interaction in culturally diverse environments.

Women are among the group who find it most difficult to move into, remain and progress in employment in rural areas. Those who do not have their own transport can spend hours taking several forms of public transport to get to their workplace or to a college or university, where courses are available to enable them to get better jobs and open up opportunities. Data shows that employment levels in these areas are high, but examining this work in greater detail shows that it is often low-paid or informal, low-skilled or seasonal, with little hope of progression.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Gale, Lady Pinnock and Lady Donaghy, all mentioned the problems relating to social care. As we know, the social care burden

usually falls to women. Rural areas can face difficulties in providing care services to the same standard and cost level as urban areas, particularly where those services involve a higher degree of travel. This means that women living in rural areas often face a particularly heavy burden, leading to them having no choice but to give up work, further education or training places. They are also often sandwich carers, caring for a loved one and bringing up children. This responsibility can make the pressure especially intense, with little or no hope of respite and in many cases no one to turn to for assistance with childcare or the nursing care of a loved one. The feeling of hopelessness and loneliness can be overwhelming.

In 2018, Girlguiding carried out some interesting research with over 1,000 girls and young women which showed that being lonely made them less confident, less happy and less likely to do activities such as sport. Talking to friends, going outdoors and being part of a youth group made them feel less lonely. Groups such as Girlguiding can play a vital role in relation to girls' mental health and well-being by strengthening their resilience, while offering a safe space and opening up opportunities for the future. To this end, Girlguiding is offering aviation badges in partnership with easyJet and a coding badge in partnership with Google, along with getting girls interested in STEM in partnership with Rolls-Royce and Amey.

Of course, many of these issues are not a problem solely for women but their voices seem so often to go unheard. "Put up with" and "Carry on" are no longer good enough and we all need to start listening and acting on what we hear. Therefore, I look forward to the Government cracking on with their investment in infrastructure and transport, along with helping community-based projects, making it possible for there to be locally based education, training and childcare for women, young and old, in rural areas, so that they can make the choices that enable them to reach their full potential.

5.08 pm

**Baroness Benjamin (LD):** My Lords, I see International Women's Day as a focal point for men to recognise women's contribution globally and for women to celebrate each other's achievements as we continue to march forward.

Women like my mother—a force of nature—paved the way for my generation, but it was tough and she had to face many unbelievable adversities. I will always be eternally grateful to her for giving me the confidence to succeed. In two days' time, I am going to Buckingham Palace to receive my damehood. I so wish she was still alive to accompany me. She would have been 94 this year. During her time, she saw progress, with some women of colour—but not all—breaking through the glass ceiling.

There has been progress towards equality for women. Yet, despite this, in the 21st century we are still witnessing reports of sexual and domestic violence against women. Most concerning is the sexualisation of young girls in a society where violent online pornography is only a mouse click away. Degrading behaviour by boys is forcing young girls, whom they see as sexual objects, to perform sexual acts they have seen online. They film

this humiliating act and then shame the girls by putting it on the web. The girls, in turn, self-harm or even take their own lives. This has to stop.

Plan International UK, a leading children's charity, asked young girls about their experiences. One 13 year-old said, "In my school there are a lot of boys who don't really know how to treat girls. A lot of boys in my year talk about girls like an object—about the way they look; if they've got a big bum or big features—stuff like that". Amazingly, only one in five secondary school teachers has received training in recognising and tackling sexism as part of their initial teacher education.

One way to correct this is for teachers to be better equipped and informed. Resources must be modernised, and school governing bodies and teachers empowered to take a zero-tolerance approach to sexism and sexual harassment. The PSHE Association trains teachers nationally to promote healthy relationships; this must be supported. It has to start in primary school. Recently, a distraught mother told me that her four year-old daughter was sexually abused by a 10 year-old boy at school. He told her: "I'm going to rape you and you're going to like it". Where on earth did he hear that language and get that behaviour from? Her daughter is now having therapy. Every time she hears the word "rape" on the news, she asks her mum, "Did she like it, mummy?"

Childhood lasts a lifetime, so what will these two victims of sexual exposure be like as adults, especially the 10 year-old? I want age verification on porn sites to be introduced to prevent children easily accessing pornography. At the moment, there are no age gates. When will the Government introduce age-verification legislation, which is ready to implement, to prevent the corruption of innocent children's minds? How many more children's lives are they prepared to witness being damaged? According to the Government's own figures, 1.4 million children a month—some as young as seven—are accessing violent, graphic pornography.

Another worrying aspect of hyper-sexualisation through pornography is the increasing number of cases of the so-called "sex game gone wrong" defence in murder cases, whereby it is claimed that the deceased woman consented to violent sex which led to her death. This rough sex defence is an uncomfortable chapter in a long history of blaming women for their own killings, rapes and beatings. Sixty women in the UK have been killed by men who have then used the "sex game gone wrong" excuse as part of their defence. Nineteen of these men escaped a murder charge. Five were not charged with anything at all. In some cases, the deaths were not even investigated as a potential crime. Since 2010, the use of rough sex as a defence has risen by 90%.

We have a duty to stop what is clearly a dangerous situation for women's safety and justice. Figures from the Centre for Women's Justice show a growing increase in the number of young women who consent to violent, demeaning acts, normalised by extreme pornography. The industry is having to become more shocking in order to get clicks, as their audience becomes immune to previous scenes. Sexualised images of strangling women are becoming more common online. There has not been one single court case in the UK of a man

[BARONESS BENJAMIN]

being killed by a woman in a sex game gone wrong. Choking during sex is being encouraged and more women are being killed. Courts are not serving justice.

It is not just the porn industry that is the problem. Women's magazines publish articles about how to spice up your sex life with what is innocently called "breath play". This is another term for choking.

If light sentences for accidental death during sexual violent acts become the norm, what message does that send out to men, especially those who commit domestic violence? If a man planned to kill a woman, it would be easy to set it up as a sex game gone wrong, and he could reduce his sentence. The courts must not allow this. It is a huge betrayal to the women whom the law is supposed to protect—women such as Hannah Pearson. She was only 16 when she was strangled to death during sex by James Morton, 24. His defence was "consented rough sex gone wrong". The jury cleared him of murder and instead ruled that it was manslaughter.

Attitudes in the justice system must be changed. Sexual violence against women must never become normalised in the belief that this is the sort of sex that people are up to in the 21st century. So can the Minister confirm that Harriet Harman's amendments, in the other place, dealing with these disturbing issues will be included in the Domestic Abuse Bill?

How has the murder of women been reduced to a game? Sexual violence is not a game and must not be accepted as such by our courts. Men must take full responsibility for preventing a woman from breathing until death.

5.16 pm

**Baroness Anelay of St Johns (Con):** My Lords, I add my congratulations to my noble friend Lord Ranger on his maiden speech and to my noble friend Lady Sugg on becoming the UK's first ever special envoy for girls' education—it is vital work that she will be doing.

This year's International Women's Day theme "Each for equal" recognises that it is vital to respect the dignity and autonomy of the individual and to give everyone an equal opportunity to live the life that they choose. When the House of Commons held its debate last Thursday, my right honourable friend Liz Truss, Secretary of State for International Trade and the GEO's Minister for Women and Equalities opened the proceedings. She talked about her experience at the UK-Africa Investment Summit held here in January. She described how she met

"a group of fantastic entrepreneurs called the Lionesses. They were from sub-Saharan Africa, where they are leading the way with the highest rate of women entrepreneurs on the planet."

She said that the Government are keen to "champion women in the workplace"

and

"ensure that everyone can enter, get back into, and get on in the workplace."—[*Official Report, Commons, 5/3/20; col. 1012.*]

Of course, I welcome that ambition whenever it comes, but I do so with particular interest at the moment because the International Relations and Defence Select Committee, which I chair, is conducting an inquiry into the UK's Africa strategy. The strategy was announced by Theresa May back in 2018, although little has been heard about it until quite recently.

We are examining how the Government could and should work in partnership with the African Union on the delivery of the AU's Agenda 2063 objectives. The agenda's aspirations for women are both ambitious and laudable. For example, by 2063:

"The African woman will be fully empowered in all spheres, with equal social, political and economic rights, including the rights to own and inherit property, sign contracts, register and manage businesses. ... All forms of gender-based violence and discrimination ... against women and girls will be eliminated ... and barriers to quality health and education for women and girls eliminated."

A year ago, the UK Government signed a joint communiqué on the AU-UK partnership, which was a welcome move. I would be grateful if my noble friend the Minister could update the House on what progress the Government have made on their support for gender-related work within the countries of sub-Saharan Africa—the countries of those entrepreneurial Lionesses.

Can the Minister explain not only how the Government support gender equality work in sub-Saharan countries which are on the Development Assistance Committee's list and thereby qualify for overseas aid, but how they support projects in those countries in sub-Saharan Africa which do not qualify for ODA—countries such as Botswana? During the February Recess, I was able to go to Botswana as a member of a delegation sent by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK. I am very grateful to the CPA in the UK and in Botswana, and to the UK's acting high commissioner in Botswana, for ensuring that the programme for our visit was both extensive and informative.

When Botswana achieved independence from Britain in 1966, it was one of the poorest countries on the planet. It is now one of Africa's most stable countries and relatively free from corruption, but it is facing the challenges of climate change, which impact on tourism and food production. There is a huge gap in resources between the very poor in rural areas and the urban middle-income group. Botswana's current classification as a middle-income country means that it does not qualify for ODA. When we met the Speaker of the National Assembly, he acknowledged the low number—11%—of women in parliament. In the elections last October, women won only three of the 57 seats in parliament. So, President Masisi used his special powers to appoint another four women as MPs, and one or two of those were immediately made Ministers. The Speaker said that significant gender inequality extends beyond the parliament in Botswana and is reflective of wider society there. In our conversations with women representatives of civil society, it was also reported that there is a relatively high level of violence against women in the home in Botswana.

I am grateful to members of the Parliamentary Caucus on Women there for meeting our delegation. Although they applaud the Government of Botswana for signing the South African Development Community's gender protocol, they made the point that they still have a long way to go to reach the recommended level of 30% of MPs being women. Does that not sound familiar to most of us in this Chamber? The National Assembly has adopted the Inter-Parliamentary Union's self-assessment toolkit and sees this as a first step towards increasing the proportion of women in the



Assembly. What action can, and will, the Government take to support their work and, of course, learn from their experience?

Finally, can my noble friend the Minister tell the House how the Government Equalities Office is contributing to the Government's integrated review of foreign policy, defence, security and international development? Clearly, the GEO has an important role to play in influencing the conclusions of that review. We have an opportunity to give real substance to the mantra of "global Britain". I believe that gender issues should be central to our global work as an inclusive, progressive country.

5.23 pm

**Baroness Prosser (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, for placing this debate on today's agenda. I look back to when I came in to the House some 15 or so years ago. At that time, the International Women's Day debate was always placed on the agenda by Baroness Gould. There were just a tiddly few of us in the Chamber speaking on this subject, almost all on these Benches. I am glad that Members on other Benches, and particularly Members of the Government, have come to recognise the importance of having a good, solid debate about the ways in which women's lives are affected throughout society, by government legislation, relationships—all sorts of things. I am grateful that the debate has been placed, but I do remember the time when it was only us few talking about it.

I want to continue the points I made earlier this afternoon and yesterday about equal pay. The Minister mentioned my Bill: I entered the ballot for a Private Member's Bill amending the equal pay legislation and my Bill came out as number 56. I was tempted, when I introduced the Bill for its First Reading, to sing the old song, "And It Was Never Seen Again", because it is very unlikely that there will be any government time for a Bill that comes out at number 56. However, I have decided, along with the Fawcett Society, which has helped me enormously in this work, to continue to bang the drum about equal pay, because if we do not keep banging the drum, it will never get better.

Alluding briefly to what I said earlier, there are couple of major points in this Bill. One I mentioned earlier is about the right to know. The Minister said today that which she did not say yesterday, which is that the Government are not overly happy about possible legislation on the right to know. I absolutely accept that it is tricky; lots of things are tricky. Building the Forth bridge was tricky, but it got done, so where there's a will, there's a way: if the Government want something to happen on this, we can make it happen. I welcome the Minister's offer of a meeting to discuss this question and to try to find a way through some of those slightly sensitive points.

Another main point in the Bill is the assessment of damages when a woman wins an equal pay case. This currently does not take account of lost pension rights, and for many women in good pensionable jobs with decent pay, the loss of pension rights adds up to more than the loss of their income. We want to promote that aspect as well, by whatever means are available. The

other side of equal pay, of course, has nothing to do with the legislation but has to do with society's expectations of women and girls, the constraints of family life, the high cost of childcare, attitudes to girls at school and many other such things. Many years ago, when Tony Blair was Prime Minister, I chaired a commission of inquiry into the continuing reasons for the gender pay and opportunities gap. We did not look at the legislation at all; we looked at all the things that make life difficult for women.

I have mentioned in this House the lack of access to decent-quality part-time employment: almost all part-time employment is at the bottom end of the pay scale. Women who trained in the National Health Service, for example, to become radiographers or to fill other highly skilled, very professional roles, have found themselves unable to continue in that work, or may not want to continue to work full-time when they have children. There are so few such jobs available part-time that those women end up working in Marks & Spencer, Tesco or Waitrose, and given that all those shops are going off the high street, those jobs will go as well, so women will be in an even more difficult position.

We also find women who start off in a workplace at one level and there they stay. Nobody says, "That woman has something about her, let us give her a bit of training." We introduced, apropos of the report back in 2006, systems through the sector skills councils for reskilling women, giving them new skills and retraining them, helping them to move up the ladder, and it went right across a whole range of sectors of the economy. More than 25,000 women benefited from that training. I go back to the point that where there's a will, there's a way. If the Government want this to change, if they want women to be able to move on and up, they have to do something about it.

The noble Baroness, Lady Rock, mentioned the small number of women in information technology. There was an organisation called Computer Skills for Girls, which trained girls up and down the land, in various schools, in computer skills, taking account of the ways that girls want to learn. It was not about war or people killing each other—there was a whole range of other skills, and it was very successful.

There are many tried-and-tested ways of improving the situation and it need not cost a great deal of money or effort. The retraining of women went through the sector skills councils and employers spend far more on it than the Government did. There are people out there who are prepared to join in and want to see these changes come about, but it needs a government lead. Without a government lead it will flounder, it will be bitsy and it will not be coherent.

5.30 pm

**The Earl of Shrewsbury (Con):** My Lords, I too congratulate my noble friend Lord Ranger on his maiden speech. I welcome this opportunity to take part in the debate today, especially as the theme of this year's International Women's Day is, "An equal world is an enabled world."

When my noble friend Lady Jenkin suggested that I take part this evening and raise the subject of the hereditary peerage and male primogeniture, it made

[THE EARL OF SHREWSBURY]

me think that I might be on a hiding to nothing with my hereditary cousins, kinsmen and colleagues, and especially my sisters, who are older than I am. I am fully aware of the gender imbalance within the hereditary peerage and the need in the modern day for that to be addressed. I believe that the hereditaries are important to this House and that we are legitimately here following the House of Lords Act 1999, but because of the way titles are inherited currently, our numbers largely exclude women. Please indulge me while I explain.

To begin with, I have four older sisters. My eldest child is my daughter, Victoria. My eldest son, James, has three daughters and a son—my grandson, George, who is the youngest. My father had three elder sisters, so male primogeniture and older sisters is a subject with which I am somewhat familiar. I am also fully familiar with Settled Land Act trusts as my family used to have one in the days when we owned estates, and with “entail male only” laws.

Some Noble Lords will remember the late Lord Diamond. Jack Diamond was a most decent man whom I respected greatly. Back in 1994 he promoted his Hereditary Peerages Bill, the intention of which was to end automatic male primogeniture and to enable the eldest child, whether they be male or female, to inherit the title.

Allow me to quote from an article in the *New York Times* dated 5 March 1994, some 26 years ago, entitled “The British Lord who is taking on History”:

“The amended version”

of Lord Diamond’s earlier, 1992 Bill, which was unsuccessful, “provides that the eldest lawfully begotten child shall succeed or, if the letters patent permit the peerage to pass to some other relative, this relative will succeed, whether female or male.”

It continues:

“Even so, Diamond knows he faces strong opposition and expects Lord Shrewsbury, the premier Earl in the peerage of England and Ireland, to move that the Bill be shelved when debate opens on Monday.”

The Bill was duly disposed of. I received a substantial bag of unpleasant mail referring to me as a misogynist who knew nothing apart from a male-dominated world, and more, in the main from correspondents who had not one idea of what I had actually said, and even less about the effects and difficulties that, if passed, the Diamond Bill would cause for many ancient, private Act of Parliament trusts, estates and much more.

But to me, far worse was the intention of the Bill—and I had many conversations with Jack Diamond about it: to disfranchise those already born of their title expectancy under the law as it stood. He was insistent that the consequences of his Bill should be retrospective; I felt that, if successful, the change to inheritance must affect children born only after Royal Assent. Because he refused, I decided that to kill the Bill at Second Reading was my only course available to protect the rights of the already born. That is what happened—not what it says in the newspapers.

We are now in 2020 and the whole world has changed, even though my loathing of political correctness has not, as my friends will confirm. In my view, male primogeniture is one of the remaining bastions of the hereditary system which should and must be changed. We hereditaries were forced to accept change in 1999 and I believe that, in many respects, that has made

those of us fortunate enough to be elected and remain in this House a good representative body of our hereditary predecessors in Parliament. Perhaps it is similar to the old system by which the Scottish Peers elected their representatives to sit in this House. That system worked admirably.

The role of women throughout society and business has changed beyond anything one could have possibly envisaged 40 years ago, and for the better too. Women are to the forefront of every walk of life: business, commerce, sport, the legal profession, the Church and, indeed, politics. We all benefit from their capabilities, their great knowledge and their great sense. It is widely thought that businesses with women on their boards are more productive and successful than those without such a presence.

I applaud the role that the Daughter’s Rights movement continues to play under the leadership of Charlotte Carew Pole. I am pleased that my right honourable friend Penny Mordaunt says that she is a supporter of ending male primogeniture and remains so at the Cabinet Office; she has said that “any organisation that has diversity of thought is stronger for it”. I believe that the time has come when change is bound to happen.

To those of my hereditary friends and colleagues who may well think that I and others who support my views are potentially swinging a wrecking ball towards the hereditary aristocracy, I say this: far from it. In 1857, the Catholic earldom of Shrewsbury’s male line failed, and my Protestant junior branch of the family—10th distant cousins, indeed—succeeded, following a case brought before the committee of privileges in your Lordship’s House. Heaven forbid: both 10th distant cousins and Protestants! In those distant days, should the title have been able to descend through the female as well as the male line, the then vast Shrewsbury Estates may well have remained intact.

Maybe the Government, with their appetite for diversity and equality, should take the lead and support a Private Member’s Bill. Indeed, should the Minister indicate her support for this initiative, I will move the matter forward to try to secure a Question for Short Debate in order to gauge the opinion of the House before moving forward.

The opportunity exists to progress this matter. Let us grasp it with both hands.

5.36 pm

**Viscount Waverley (CB):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, on his maiden speech and was reminded while listening to it that, throughout my family, women most certainly rule. I am particularly pleased to follow the noble Earl, Lord Shrewsbury, for reasons that I will expand upon shortly.

Given the small number of male contributors, I intervene to illustrate the point: the numbers speak for themselves. While women uphold their values, it behoves more men to come to the fore in support. These challenges will be resolved only with a change in mindset, with men in particular having the responsibility to step up to ensure that we will all work together to achieve these essential outcomes. Much remains to be done.

Insufficient attention is paid to celebrate women's roles and achievements. I unreservedly add voice to the further empowerment of women internationally, not forgetting that the day for women coincides with Commonwealth Day. What better example of leadership and thoughtfulness is there than Her Majesty, Head of the Commonwealth?

Many issues emerge in restrictions placed on the role of women in society, including in religious contexts, a point recognised by the institute promoting Islamic learning instigated by King Mohammed in Rabat. With sensitivity, I wonder if the role of women in Islamic society might become more recognised.

The ending of violence against women, the promotion of economic empowerment, the championing of voluntary access to family planning and the breaking of barriers to equal access to education for girls—to these advances, the right of primogeniture must be seen as morally unsustainable in today's world. To that end, I offer unfettered support to the noble Earl, Lord Shrewsbury, on his request. These are all to name but a few. I would go so far on the issue of primogeniture—and even had it in mind to suggest this but the noble Earl has beaten me to the draw—to suggest testing the opinion of the House on a Private Member's Bill at the right time, which I am sure many would agree is highly appropriate. It would certainly have my support.

The Boston Consulting Group has called women “the most underutilized asset in the world”.

In 2019, when more than 50% of graduates are women, making up 80% of all purchasing decisions globally—that is from the OECD and Deloitte—we are still facing few women-led businesses. The barriers of inadequate access to finance and lack of access to managerial training are a major global hindrance. The economic activity of women must be viewed not just as a mechanism for social justice but a tool for reducing global poverty. A stronger role for women contributes to economic growth and reduction of poverty, so making the strengthening of opportunities for women central to sustainable development.

The marking of the short hundred years since the first women in Britain stood for election in Parliament puts this important subject in sharp focus and serves as a stark reminder of how women are shaping the agenda for the future. There is still much to be done.

5.41 pm

**Lord Hussain (LD):** My Lords, I too thank the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, for introducing this debate. We in the western democracies are discussing gender balance in our places of work and promotion and retention of women in senior jobs, and addressing equal pay deficiencies and equal rights in the private and public life of women, but at the same time in many parts of the world women are still mistreated and abused openly, under complete impunity with the full knowledge and protection of the authorities. Rape of women and girls is used as a weapon of war.

One such country, where women live in the most appalling conditions, is a close friend of the United Kingdom, a member of the British Commonwealth and the proclaimed largest democracy in the world: India, specifically Kashmir, where, according to many

international human rights organisations, the army frequently forces its way into people's homes in the darkness of night, beating up men and women, young and old, and taking young men to unknown detention centres often far from their homes. Tens of thousands of men have been taken away and have not come back for a very long time. The whereabouts of many are still not known to their families. Thousands of women, whose husbands have been missing for decades, are known as half-widows. The discovery of thousands of mass graves in Kashmir adds to the worry and agony of these women. They spend the rest of their lives searching for their loved ones.

To add to their dreadful conditions, those women are often gang-raped by the country's army with complete impunity. There are many cases in Kashmir of rape carried out by the Indian Armed Forces. Some of these cases are well documented and have received worldwide press coverage, but to my knowledge no prosecution has ever taken place. For example, if you google “Kunan Poshpora rape case” you will find reports from Amnesty International, the UN Commission on Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and Indian human rights organisations, reported by the BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, the *Indian Express*, the *Diplomat*, the *Hindustan Times*, *Greater Kashmir*, the *Asian Age* and many other media groups. This case is 30 years' old: an entire army unit moved into two adjoining villages, took the men and boys out to the nearby army camp and gang-raped women from eight years of age to 80. Despite the worldwide uproar, no prosecution has ever taken place, as the army is protected under the Indian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. I understand that the Indian Army is continuously using rape as a weapon of war in Kashmir; there are many more cases of this nature, taking the number of victims into the thousands.

Just for a moment, put yourselves in the place of the Kashmiri women and think what you would ask of parliamentarians from countries such as the United Kingdom? I have raised the plight of Kashmiri women many times from the Floor of this House, unfortunately without getting a satisfactory answer from Ministers. Will noble Lords join me in asking the Minister what the Government are prepared to do to get justice for these Kashmiri victims of state-led brutalities? Will she ask the Foreign Secretary to raise this with his Indian counterpart before we sign more trade deals with India, to bring an end to the impunity provided by the Indian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act and bring those responsible for these horrendous crimes to justice?

5.45 pm

**Baroness Secombe (Con):** My Lords, over the years this annual debate has had contributions on many differing subjects, ranging from praise for those brave women who face hostile opposition to women having the vote and the hot issues of the day. There are many exciting positive things taking place now which I approve wholeheartedly, but others give me some concern. Today, I will make just two points.

First, I refer to the debate introduced by my noble friend Lord Lucas on women's loos. As the mother of two sons, I well remember the first time I stood outside

[BARONESS SECCOMBE]

a male lavatory waiting for them to emerge unharmed. I strongly believe that separate female and male lavatories should be available for those who wish to have such provision. It is important for women; it is also important for men, as they can be uncomfortable having to wash their hands among make-up and other personal toiletries.

I am not a supporter of the woke community, which believes in unisex loos. I fear that among the self-identifying transgender people there are those whose presence in an area defined as women's lavatories could distress vulnerable women, and in a public place that is just not acceptable. I find it strange that the guidance refers to unisex provision as preferable. I wonder why.

My second point is on the treatment of children on gender reassignment. I am horrified that children should wish for a sex change. I feel for parents who are faced with such difficulties, but I think sensitivity, understanding and specialist help, if needed, should be sufficient. The work of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, which advises on medical intervention, is wrong; it is criminal at such a time in a young person's life. What could be more confusing if a change of mind occurs a few years later, as has happened? Only last week Keira Bell said she should have been challenged as a teenager when, aged 16, she had treatment at the clinic. Now aged 23, she resents this. Living as a woman again, she angrily claims that children are far "too young to give informed consent to such treatment".

Puberty in any young person's life, with the physical changes taking place, is always a time when emotions run riot, ranging from elation to depression, while relationships with male and female friends fluctuate for no apparent reason. Adolescence is not the time to think of surgery and other permanent, irreversible treatments. Once someone has reached adulthood that is a personal decision, but if gender reassignment is pursued the necessary processes must be followed, as trans self-identifying women are not welcome in women-only places.

It is always good to celebrate improvements in the lives of women. Over the years we have had this debate, we have been able to applaud our predecessors. Today with changing lifestyles where women have adapted, with two-income families being the norm and single-parent working families with the caring parent battling on, they deserve praise. But I fear in the future that some of our fashionable woke policies will be seen as us having taken the wrong path. I wonder whether our successors will be able to admire all our contributions. I would like to think we would give them good reason to do so, but I fear that we will not.

5.50 pm

**Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Lab):** My Lords, I am delighted to be able to contribute to this important debate to mark International Women's Day. In this debate I—another girl from the Rhondda—am able to pay tribute to my noble friend Lady Gale of Blaenrhondda, who has personally moved the equality agenda forward against great opposition in our party in Wales. Her plans for all-women shortlists for parliamentary selections and for the Welsh Assembly twinning arrangements were nothing less than revolutionary.

My noble friend Lady Gale clearly saw and experienced that our elected politicians did not reflect the make-up of our communities. A woman was elected to Parliament in a by-election in the Cynon Valley in 1984, and no other woman was elected in Wales until the introduction of all-women shortlists in 1997. *Diolch yn fawr*—I thank my noble friend Lady Gale for the incredible changes she pushed through to ensure that women like me were able to take part in politics in our country. Our party politics has been changed ineradicably. We are grateful for her persistence and her belief that women were equally capable of becoming MPs and AMs in Wales.

In my own area, local government, in Wales only 28% of local government elected members are women—a far lower figure than in England and Scotland. Things are changing, but not quickly enough. In 2016, I was immensely proud to become the first woman leader of Newport City Council in its 180-year history, and the following year I broke another mould, becoming the first woman leader of the Welsh Local Government Association. During my leadership, I have continued to play an active role in mentoring and diversity programmes designed to promote women's active participation in politics at both local and national level.

We need greater diversity in local government but also in our national Governments. We need more women and younger women sitting in our Chambers and around our Cabinet tables. Diversity—of backgrounds and life experience—helps to balance opinions and make better decisions, which lead to better outcomes.

Many women are passionate volunteers, community activists and powerful community leaders, helping to inspire and sustain our communities through one of the most challenging periods of public service in decades. But achieving balance is not just a women's issue, as many noble Lords have already espoused. It is everyone's issue, and I am confident that many political colleagues across local and national government share that same ambition and commitment.

In my area of south-east Wales we are working towards developing a workforce for a digital economy, with a focus on doubling the digitally skilled workforce in the Cardiff capital region, and future-proofing our workforce by focusing on high-level digital specialist-specific skills, such as artificial intelligence, building information modelling, fintech and voice recognition security. However, within the region, only 13% of employers utilise apprenticeships, and just 1.5% of year 11 schoolchildren went directly into apprenticeships last year. So we need to extend the range of higher-level apprenticeships and introduce degree-level apprenticeships as an alternative, and cost-effective, route to higher education. We also need a particular emphasis on attracting young women into higher-level apprenticeships.

Research shows that across the UK, women currently make up 47% of employees in the STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—with a quarter of the jobs in mathematical sciences and 13% in engineering positions. However, the lack of female role models in STEM is a key reason why girls do not pursue a career in the sector. Just 42% of girls said that they would consider a STEM-related career, but this rose to 60% if they had confidence that men and women were equally employed in those professions.

This is something we can and must address. Governments have the responsibility for education, but we also have an interest as major employers too. Through our councils we should recruit diverse, ambitious and talented people into STEM fields, including accountancy, architecture, civil engineering and ICT, as teachers and lab technicians, and in waste management and our various regulatory and enforcement roles, such as environmental health and food safety.

Female representation is not a “nice to have” option; it is an economic imperative. Evidence shows that equity and productivity in business can be increased by around 10% by having females in leadership positions, as they are better able to understand and empathise with consumption patterns. If girls and women are not involved in and leading STEM, their ideas and experiences cannot influence the innovations that help to shape and transform our society. The rapid pace of change is constantly challenging and disrupting the status quo; we have no excuse and no better opportunity to reset the gender divide and ensure greater balance. Innovation means that there is no such thing as “business as usual”, and traditional structural barriers are being swept away.

Role models and mentors can play a major part in this by encouraging young people to see beyond the binary of “jobs for girls and jobs for boys”. We need to have more initiatives to promote careers, and they need to include a stronger focus on girls. Our innovators and leaders of tomorrow are sitting in the classrooms, colleges and universities of today. This is our chance to make sure that no woman or girl is left behind. As former First Lady Michelle Obama so aptly said,

“no country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens.”

5.56 pm

**Baroness Cox (CB):** My Lords, I also congratulate the noble Baronesses, Lady Berridge and Lady Sugg, on their appointments, which we warmly welcome.

As I will be speaking about older women, perhaps I should declare an interest, given my age of 82. However, I wish to focus on the achievements of older women working with small non-governmental organisations—NGOs—such as the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, or HART, which I founded in 2004. These women achieve transformational changes for their communities in very remote locations not reached by major aid organisations for political or security reasons, or because of difficulty of access. We in HART are always humbled and inspired by the resourcefulness and resilience of these indigenous older women in very challenging situations. In some cases we are privileged to work with other NGOs also committed to working with and for isolated communities. May I invite your Lordships to make two visits to appreciate the achievements of these valiant older women?

First, please come with me to Sudan's Nuba mountains in the years between the signing of the peace agreement in 2005 and the outbreak of further military offensives by the Khartoum regime after the independence of South Sudan. Life was formidably challenging for the widows whose husbands had died in the war waged by Khartoum from 1989 to 2005. Buildings in the Nuba

mountains were destroyed by bombing, it is harsh terrain, water is difficult to access, and survival for the widows and their families was very difficult.

We in HART visited these areas, and we always ask our local partners to identify their priorities for aid. Those widows collected wild fruits, and they asked for assistance to help to establish centres where they could preserve them and sell them as jams or juices. We were able to provide some funding. When we returned, we were humbled and thrilled to see the superb brick huts they had built, with good equipment and even beautiful flowerbeds. There were six centres in different parts of the Nuba mountains, and I wish your Lordships could have seen the widows' pride and their smiles as they showed us their achievements. One lady had even learned enough English to welcome us in our own language, shyly but graciously.

Also, their effective initiatives brought respect and new recognition in their communities, such as appointments to village councils. Life was transformed for these courageous widows, who would have remained in abject poverty and been totally marginalised had they not received help to realise their potential and the dignity of self-sufficiency. Very sadly, when fighting broke out again in the subsequent civil war, at least one of the widows was killed and their work was destroyed. We hope that, with the improvement in the situation in Sudan, survivors will be able to restart their inspirational work.

Secondly, please come with me to the remotest regions in the jungles and mountains of Burma's Chin state. It is so remote that, when a small team from HART visited in 2015, there were no roads. We had to travel the last 20 hours in a jeep on a way hacked through the jungle, with a 2,000-foot precipice on one side and a cliff on the other—but it was worth every minute. The region was so inaccessible that there was no healthcare, and childhood mortality rates were indescribably high. It was HART's privilege to support a brave young man, known as Dr Sasa, while he was studying to qualify as a doctor in Armenia in order to return to his people in Chin state and establish a training centre for community health workers, so that they could take life-saving healthcare to their villages, saving the lives of eight out of 10 people who would previously have died.

People in remote areas will die of cancer and old age, of course, but the conditions that cause the highest mortality rates are those such as malaria, diarrhoea and infections from cuts from bamboo. The community health workers were able to prevent and treat these. Dr Sasa's work was then supported by another small NGO, Health & Hope; now, more than 1,000 health workers continue to save the lives of eight out of 10 people in a catchment area of 250,000 people in remote villages.

However, problems with maternal and child health persisted, as childbirth was managed by traditional birth attendants—TBAs—with no relevant knowledge. This was not their fault; no knowledge was available. Inevitably, maternal and infant mortality rates were tragically high, until networking established another small NGO, BirthLink; it was established by Kathy Mellor, a highly qualified neonatal nurse and specialist, and her team. They went to train the TBAs in appropriate

[BARONESS COX]

maternity and infant care. She and her midwife colleagues often had to ride on motorbikes for 17 hours through the jungle to reach the location for training. The TBAs—many of them local elderly women, including grandmothers—have now become so clinically competent that the orphanage that cared for the numerous infants whose mothers had died in childbirth has now been closed. There is no need for it.

In conclusion, I record my admiration for the courage, resourcefulness and compassion of the women whom it has been our great privilege to help as they achieve life-changing developments for their communities. Can the Minister give an assurance that aid for older women such as these will remain a priority—or, indeed, will be one, as I am not sure it is now? Will DfID work to find ways to provide aid for small NGOs working in challenging remote areas where indigenous partners, many of them elderly women, demonstrate outstanding resilience, compassion and commitment, saving countless lives and bringing hope and health to communities that were previously unreached, and left to suffer and die in ignorance and isolation?

6.03 pm

**Baroness Fall (Con):** My Lords, I want to take noble Lords back to 3 May 1997. For better or worse, I, like most of us in this Chamber, woke to the advent of the Blair dawn—with a soundtrack of Oasis. I was in my 20s and had been working as the desk officer for Europe at Conservative Central Office—a straightforward job, as noble Lords can imagine. This was my first general election and my first taste of political defeat, but certainly not my last. The memory of that election night haunted me, with its images of well-known politicians such as Michael Portillo losing their seats, but another image made a great impression just a few days later: a picture of Prime Minister Blair surrounded by a group of 101 women, all of them Labour MPs, who quickly became known as the Blair babes.

Whatever we think of that label—and we probably do not think much of it—the impact of that image was huge. Here was change personified in those women. On our side, we had just 13 female Tory MPs. I am not lambasting my own party. We boast not just the first but the second female Prime Minister of this great country; that is a straightforward 100% success rate. This is no fluke. It shows the deeply ingrained respect and admiration for women in public life in our party and their treatment as equals.

It is also true, however, that all our pride in our premiers cannot make up for the lack of stronger representation on our Benches. We had a battle to change things in our party. Slowly, we began to make progress. A lot of things are responsible for this: the leadership of Prime Minister David Cameron; the determination of two Jenkins, Anne and Bernard—especially Anne, my noble friend Lady Jenkin, with her pioneering and painstaking work at Women2Win; the determination of many women who bravely toured the country trying and trying again to get selected, which some did; and the countless others who helped them. By 2015, we had 68 women MPs, around 20% of the party, and we are now on 24%. When I see many talented women on those green Benches—many of

them new to Parliament—I feel a huge sense of pride, but we should be honest: we still have a very long way to go. Getting women into Parliament is only the tip of the iceberg. Keeping them here, and making sure that their voices are heard and carry equal weight, is also important.

My son goes to an all-boys' school. There is a debate there at the moment about whether they should take girls. At a recent gathering of parents, the head responded to one mum, saying, "I'm not so concerned about whether your son can talk to girls, Mrs So-and-so; I'm concerned about whether he is listening to them." That sums up the situation nicely.

Politics is still, by and large, a male-dominated world. It is not alone in being like this—other professions tend in this direction—but it matters all the more because the centre of power should represent the people it governs. We need to hear a diversity of views and different perspectives from those ultimately responsible for the laws of our land. There is still a latent feeling that a man's opinion can be worth more. This is about not just MPs being heard in the Chamber but voices being heard in meetings where important decisions are made. One of those meetings is called Cabinet. We still need to push back against the outmoded sense that some topics are for women and others for men. Men make fiscal policy while women do "women's issues". This has changed over my political lifetime but I wonder, as did the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, when we will see a women Chancellor.

While full of good intent, this debate in honour of International Women's Day, which I support fully, begs the question: is there an International Men's Day or is that every day? How often have I heard the narrative, "It should be quality, not quantity", referring to the advancement of women in Parliament or within government? This always makes me wince. When did we hear this about the many men promoted? Of course, everyone should be promoted on talent, but talent in politics comes in lots of different guises. Would you make a good Minister? Do you listen? Do you, like my noble friend Lady Newlove, stand up for people who do not have a voice? We should not seek just to get the women who are the most like the men into politics.

I am not alone in being disappointed to see so many decent and brave women MPs stand down at the last election. We should ask ourselves what drove that decision. There was the obvious stress of a divisive time and a highly pressurised Parliament, but there is more. The sacrifices of a political life are still real. Parliament still works late at night, creating conflict with family life. The culture of Parliament can still be part club and part bear pit, which seems to suit men more than women. The truth is that women in public life often face more abuse. We need to think about these challenges and try to mitigate them.

When I sat in the Bishop's Bar having a cup of tea with my noble friend Lady Bertin and baby Edward during a three-line Whip a few weeks ago, I felt pride in being two mums in the mother of all Parliaments. It has already come a long way in welcoming women but has a lot further to go. The truth is that we need to work hard to support women in public life, from creating confident girls to headhunting women into

Parliament and supporting them the whole way through their careers. We cannot lecture the world on respecting equality if our own House is not in order. I can think of no better group of people than those sitting with me today in this Chamber to work together to make this happen.

6.09 pm

**Baroness Nye (Lab):** My Lords, I too am grateful to the noble Baroness the Minister for introducing this debate and I congratulate her on her new role. I am also grateful for the many interesting and informative contributions we have heard from all sides of the House. I am pleased to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Fall, because although I have not read her book yet, I am sure that we could swap stories about the trials and tribulations of gatekeeping as an occupation.

This is a timely debate which is taking place the day before the first Budget since the general election last year and at a time of great global economic uncertainty. It is therefore critical that women's voices are heard and listened to by Governments if a gender-equal world is to be achieved. While we use International Women's Day to celebrate women's achievements, and we have heard about many of them today, it is also a call to action on accelerating women's equality and challenging stereotypes. That call to action has to recognise the undervalued role of some women in the UK today.

Analysis by the Young Women's Trust and the Women's Budget Group shows that 60% of unpaid work is carried out by women. Those women might be defined as "economically inactive" but that is to ignore the fundamental contribution they make to the economy and the well-being of our country. The Government, and especially the Chancellor tomorrow, should remember that women's unpaid work contributes £140 billion to the economy, which is more than the financial sector did last year. One way to acknowledge that unpaid work supports the economic choices of others would be to increase the carer's allowance, as has been illustrated by my noble friend Lady Donaghy and the noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found that almost 40% of young female carers live in poverty.

Immense barriers to work remain for women, who are still responsible for the majority of childcare. Many young women cannot afford to go to work or stay in work because of the high cost of childcare. Perhaps the Minister will update us on when the Government will announce the results of the consultation on reforming parental leave and pay, which may now be getting a little more attention at the top. Stereotypical careers advice at school perpetuates the gender pay gap. The Fawcett Society has found that the majority of women felt their career choices had been restricted because of the advice they received and, although the trend of more women than men accessing higher education continues, it is still the case that men earn more than women within five years of completing their degree across all subjects.

If women go into apprenticeships, men get paid more, get more training and end up being paid more at the end of the apprenticeship. For every 20 men starting

in engineering, there is still only one woman, as the noble Baroness, Lady Wilcox, highlighted in her speech. The Chartered Institute of Building says that we need to find 160,000 new recruits in construction by 2023 to keep up with demand. That is why a company like Wates should be congratulated on the announcement of a partnership with the Young Women's Trust to support and inspire more women to take up careers in construction. More businesses in the UK need to follow Wates's example and have diversity and inclusion programmes which create a workforce that is reflective of society. But as sectors denied to women are opened up, tools and equipment need to be made to female specifications. This time last year, the first spacewalk by two women astronauts had to be cancelled because NASA did not have the right size spacesuits. I hope that has now changed, because any woman wanting to be the first woman on the moon in 2024 has just the month of March to apply.

The Government's aim to help provide 12 years of quality education for all girls globally by 2030 is essential if we are to live in a gender-equal world. We should remember in this debate the women and children in refugee camps around the world and the 130 million girls who are missing out on school, so I welcome the Minister's appointment as the special envoy for girls' education. She well knows the plight of the Rohingya in Bangladesh, having visited the camps herself, and I declare an interest as a trustee of the Burma Campaign UK. The Rohingya women and children fled genocide and sexual violence by the Burmese army and now live in the largest refugee camps in the world. Bangladesh, itself one of the poorest countries in the world, has to its credit accepted nearly 1 million refugees from Burma, but has denied them education. Now it has announced that 10,000 boys and girls aged 11 to 13 can enrol in school.

Nearly half the refugees fleeing the ethnic cleansing by the Burmese army were children. Basic nursery education for small children is provided only to some who can be reached by aid groups. For women and girls in the IDP camps inside Burma, there is no access to education or humanitarian assistance and they still suffer from routine sexual violence. While the investigation at the International Criminal Court and the genocide case at the International Court of Justice can address the issue of rape and sexual violence against Rohingya women, they will not be able to investigate or hold accountable the use of rape as a weapon of war against women from other ethnic groups in Burma such as the Kachin and the Shan. The sight of Aung San Suu Kyi defending the actions of the Burmese military against the Rohingya is not something to celebrate and I hope that the Minister will be able to say what steps the British Government are taking to ensure accountability for all crimes committed by the Burmese military, not just those against the Rohingya.

Finally, I pay tribute to the members of the Women's League of Burma. They bravely document rape and sexual violence by the Burmese military and assist survivors, but they do not, as far as I am aware, receive any financial support from the British Government for this vital work. I am sure that the Minister will agree that these women's organisations should be receiving British support.

[BARONESS NYE]

Goal 5 of the UN's sustainable development goals is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and is a standalone goal, but the other SDGs can be achieved only if the needs of women receive the same attention as those of men. Gloria Steinem said:

"The story of women's struggle for equality belongs to no single feminist nor to any one organization but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights."

That is a call we can all support.

6.15 pm

**Lord Bates (Con):** My Lords, there is one area where women have never been the equal of men and I pray never will be, and that is in their propensity for physical violence and war-making. Wherever you look in the world, both past and present, and you see scenes of violence, it will be invariably be the men pulling the triggers and wielding the knives. By contrast, the women are seen cradling the bloodied bodies of their children in hospital or weeping over the graves of their loved ones. You might say that it was ever thus and the evolutionary psychologists would agree with you. They would point to innate characteristics which suggest that when a baby boy picks up a stick, it immediately becomes a weapon or a sword, and when a baby girl picks up a stick, it becomes a wand or a toy. They would say that this stems from the male role in most animal species to be aggressively defending territory and competing for hierarchy.

Harvard Professor Steven Pinker has suggested that the male body is evolving slowly away from aggression, but while we wait for that to happen, the nature of modern warfare and conflict has changed much more quickly. There were times when men would disappear off into an open field or clearing and slug it out with their opponents, observing some basic rules of chivalry. Today, warfare has changed and now the battlegrounds are cities, the tools are aerial bombardments and the targets are homes, schools, hospitals and marketplaces. Women have become weapons of war, subject to horrific sexual violence. This has led a UN peacekeeping operations commander, Major General Patrick Cammaert, to observe:

"It is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern conflict."

One has only to look at the carnage in places such as Syria and to contemplate whether the situation would be same if the leaders of Syria, Russia and Turkey were all female.

We need humility because this is not just a problem for other countries. The latest available figures for England and Wales show that men are responsible for 85% of all crime, 88% of violent crimes against the person, 90% of murders and 98% of all sexual violence that occurs. What can we do about it? Well, one thing would be to get more women into positions of real power. It is a core truth of development that women are less prone to initiate violent conflict, less corrupt, and tend to prioritise health and social care in development. In summary, women in development are the nearest thing you can get to a triple-word score. You just have to look at Bangladesh and Rwanda to see that that is the case.

How can we get more women into positions of real power? I have three suggestions for my noble friend on the Front Bench. The first is that I am delighted that she has been appointed as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Girls' Education. Some of the best development work I ever saw was through funding scholarships through Commonwealth funds and the Chevening Scholarship programme. Is there a case for an exclusively female scholarship fund that would seek to invest in leadership skills among females in the worst-performing countries in the Women, Peace and Security Index—which are, for the record, Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, South Sudan, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Mali, Libya, Sudan and Chad: a kind of "Women2Win Goes Global", if my noble friend Lady Jenkin will permit me to say that.

Secondly, we need to do more to divert male aggression down less destructive paths. This is not a new idea. In 776 BC, Iphitos, King of Elis, lamented the endless cycle of wars and violence in the Peloponnese and conceived a sporting games that would allow young men to channel their youthful aggression and achieve glory and respect from their peers without killing people. That led to the formation of the ancient Olympic Games. Here I declare an interest as a member of the International Olympic Truce Foundation board of the International Olympic Committee. My second suggestion is therefore that we invest more in competitive sport opportunities for men and boys in the worst-performing countries on the Women, Peace and Security index. This is consistent with the approach we take, for example, in promoting boxing clubs in England and Wales to tackle the growth in knife crime.

My third suggestion is to have more women in leadership roles nationally and internationally, and to lead by example. It is 75 years since the formation of the United Nations and we are still waiting for our first female UN Secretary-General, despite having extraordinarily able candidates—such as Amina Mohammed—to choose from. NATO has been in existence for 68 years and has had 13 Secretaries-General, all male, despite having eminently qualified deputies such as Rose Gottemoeller. Will my noble friend commit to the Government supporting only female candidates when these two roles next come up for appointment?

I am afraid that we are not doing much better here, as has been mentioned. We have had more female Prime Ministers than female Foreign Secretaries or female Secretaries of State for Defence. The office of Foreign Secretary was established in 1782. During that time, according to my calculations, there have been 86 male Foreign Secretaries and one female, Margaret Beckett. In only one of the 238 years of the office's existence has there been a female Foreign Secretary at the helm. The record shows that no new wars were initiated during that year.

The Defence Secretary post was established in 1794 under the distinctly un-PC title of Secretary of State for War and the Colonies. The UK Secretary of State for Defence has been run by men for 226 years of its existence, less 85 days. The 85 days were the entire tenure of my right honourable friend Penny Mordaunt, despite the fact that she is the daughter of a paratrooper and named after a battleship—HMS "Penelope"—



represents Portsmouth and was a naval reservist and a former Minister of State for the Armed Forces. Contrast that with the leadership of DfID, which has been in existence for 23 years and has had 11 Secretaries of State, six of whom have been women. Fourteen of the 23 years have seen a female Secretary of State at the helm.

These are my calculations. Will my noble friend undertake for someone from the Government Equalities Office to write to me with their calculations and to add in the number of female Permanent Secretaries at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence—and, for that matter, Cabinet Secretaries? I assure her that this last task will not take very long at all. As I am manifestly bereft of any vested interest in such matters, I will then undertake to write to my right honourable friend the Prime Minister and the Government Chief Whip to ask whether, as representatives of the party that has given our country both its female Prime Ministers, they could address these issues in future appointments by who I am glad to say remain Her Majesty's Government.

6.22 pm

**Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill (Lab):** My Lords, I congratulate both noble Baronesses on their new roles. I too welcome the opportunity to mark International Women's Day to raise the issue of women's decreasing life expectancy. The Marmot review of health equity in England makes the shocking finding that, in the last decade:

"Life expectancy for women in the most deprived 10 percent of neighbourhoods decreased in every region",

bar three. Life expectancy has stalled for the first time in more than 100 years. Healthy life expectancy has also declined for women since 2010, and the percentage of life spent in ill health has increased.

This is a worrying reversal of the established trend for life expectancy at birth, which has been increasing since the beginning of the 20th century. There was around a one-year increase every five and a half years for women from 1981 to 2010, but that has now slowed to a one-year increase every 28 years from 2011 to 2018. Marmot says that

"in England, health is getting worse for people living in more deprived districts and regions, health inequalities are increasing and ... lives for people towards the bottom of the social hierarchy have been made more difficult. Some of these difficulties have been the direct result of government policies".

Austerity-driven cuts in services and changes in benefit provision have had a direct and adverse effect on the most deprived women in society. Real cuts in income are damaging women's health, and more children are living in poverty.

Michael Marmot highlights the impact of

"rising child poverty ... the closure of children's centres ... declines in education funding, an increase in precarious work and zero hours contracts ... a housing affordability crisis and a rise in homelessness"

and the increasing need to resort to food banks as all contributing to the decline in women's health. Benefit cuts and sanctions that push single mothers into poorly paid part-time jobs in which they end up having to juggle families and work are taking their toll. Research has shown that most jobseekers are keen to work and

do not require the threat of sanction. Instead, sanctions cause further poverty and, in some cases, destitution—manifested in increased debt and use of food banks, as well as worsening mental health.

A five-year study of welfare conditionality conducted by the University of York from 2013 to 2018 criticised the use of conditionality in England's employment support system. Another recent study by the University of Liverpool found that universal credit is linked to a rise in psychological stress and has created soaring rates of depression in claimants. The report finds a 6.6% increase in mental health issues among recipients since the introduction of UC, a third of whom become clinically depressed. The stress level is understandable when we imagine the impact of having to wait five weeks to receive the first payment, the resulting mounting debt, the need to resort to food banks, falling behind with rent and, in the worst cases, eviction and homelessness.

The OECD report *How's Life? 2020* points out that "deaths of despair"—those resulting from "suicide, acute alcohol abuse and drug overdose"—

have increased for women in more than a third of countries. In England, the highest suicide rates among women in 2018 were in Yorkshire and the Humber and the south-west. The Government argue that the way to reduce child poverty is for parents to work, helped by free or reduced-cost childcare places. Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation says these schemes do not effectively target the most needy. In fact, rates of children in poverty living in working households have increased since 2010. Among lone-parent families in full-time work in 2010-11, after taking housing costs into account, child poverty rates were 18%, but this increased to 30% by 2017-18.

While more women are in work now, average weekly wages have not recovered to the 2010 level. According to the Resolution Foundation, since 2008 there has been a reduction in average real weekly earnings as well as a large reduction in benefits available for working-age people and children.

The nature of work needs to be considered. Being in poverty and working in poor-quality employment have marked effects on physical and mental health, including on children in the families concerned. Zero-hours contracts are highly insecure and add to the stress levels that poorer women are increasingly struggling with. Overall, more people are now on these contracts, the number having increased from 168,000 in 2010 to nearly 900,000 by late 2018. As Marmot says:

"An established evidence base has demonstrated that insecure work, characterised by short-term, or no, contracts and consequent high risk of losing the job and associated anxiety are harmful to health".

He calls on the Government to create fair employment and good work for all by investing in good-quality active labour-market policies; reducing conditionalities and sanctions in benefit entitlement, particularly for those with children; reducing in-work poverty by increasing the national living wage; and reducing the high levels of poor-quality work and precarious employment. Marmot says that

"over the last decade government allocations of funding have declined most in poorer areas and this must be reversed".

[BARONESS HEALY OF PRIMROSE HILL]

The Government have the opportunity tomorrow to address these issues in the Budget—as well as to prepare for the impact of the coronavirus—and must recognise how much investment is needed to level up the life chances of the poorest, especially women, having been responsible over the last decade for lowering life expectancy through their policy of austerity.

6.29 pm

**Baroness Penn (Con):** My Lords, I add my congratulations to both Ministers on their new roles, and to the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, on his remarkable maiden speech.

I am conscious of how wide-ranging today's debate has been, and that I am focusing on only one aspect of women's equality and just one of the policy levers available to address it. Like the noble Baroness, Lady Prosser, I want to focus on equal pay, and add an extra item to the to-do list she has drawn up for the Government.

We have heard in the debate that the gender pay gap for women in the UK is closing, albeit too slowly. In fact, for women in their 20s and 30s, the gender pay gap for full-time work is almost non-existent. However, once women reach their 40s, the gap for full-time work has grown to 11% and reaches as high as 25% overall for women in their 50s. The decisive change in these figures is, for many women, triggered by the decision to have a family. Research by the IFS shows that when a couple have their first child, on average, the wage gap between the mother and father is 10%. However, by the time of the child's 13th birthday, it has grown to 30%, often driven by the mother's decision to move to part-time work.

There are many ways in which we can try to close this pay gap: making sure that part-time work is valued as much as full-time work and offers the same opportunities for progression; and improving the accessibility and affordability of childcare, so that mothers who want to be in full-time work can be. But these responses all bake-in the assumption that it is mums who become the primary carer when they have children and that we need to make it easier for them to balance caring responsibilities and their careers. Would it not be better if both parents needed to balance caring responsibilities and their careers? We need to make it easier for everyone to do that and value both these roles, for men and women, in their lives.

I was pleased that the Minister mentioned shared parental leave, which I will come on to shortly. As she said, parenting is an equal responsibility, but the reality is that our parental leave system remains highly gendered. From the start of a child's life, government policy builds in the assumption that the mother will be the primary carer. In fact, at 52 weeks, the UK offers new mothers the longest period of dedicated maternity leave of all the OECD countries. In contrast, our dedicated offer for fathers, at just two weeks, is among the lowest and is six weeks shorter than the average. This is despite evidence showing a substantial pay-off if fathers take more parental leave.

Before couples have a child, they tend to share unpaid housework evenly. However, after having children, on average, it is women who take on more of the burden. When dads take more parental leave, the division of

unpaid work tends to be more even. They are more likely to take an active role in childcare, both early on and when they return to work. Increased parental engagement leads to better health and development outcomes for the child, and has benefits for fathers themselves, who report greater satisfaction in parenting and increased well-being. All of this has knock-on benefits for women's labour market outcomes. As well as encouraging a more equal division of unpaid work, it creates a culture where it is normal for men to take substantial leave when they have children. This can reduce gender discrimination at work and reduce the risk that it is only women who take care-related leave, with its knock-on effect on career development and earnings.

The introduction of paternity leave and additional paternity leave by the previous Labour Government was a welcome step, as was the coalition Government's introduction of shared parental leave. Having spoken to those who have used it, I know that it has made a real difference, but it is far from perfect. On women in politics, the noble Baroness, Lady Fall, made the point that there is still no formal system of maternity or paternity leave for Ministers in the Government.

We knew when introducing shared parental leave that it was not perfect. Two key factors to improve the take-up of leave by men are the rate of pay and having a dedicated period of leave for fathers. But shared parental leave was introduced at a time when no funding was available to increase pay beyond the statutory amount, or to create additional leave for dads only. Instead, it relies on a system of transferring some of the mum's maternity leave to dad.

I am pleased that the Government are evaluating how shared parental leave has worked so far and have consulted on next steps, including on how the policy can encourage more fathers to take parental leave. Will the Minister tell us whether that evaluation was completed by the end of last year, as the Government said it would be, and when they will share the results of that evaluation with the House? I understand that this a complex area and further reform will take time, but that is why we need to get going.

There are other important steps we can take along the way. This week, the Government announced that they will take forward one of the measures from their consultation by introducing additional parental leave for mums and dads of premature babies. That is a really welcome step.

I close by suggesting one more quick win for the Government from that same consultation: getting employers to publish their parental leave policies on their websites. It is already best practice among good employers, but if we get everyone to do it, it would help all parents and potential parents to make informed decisions about how to balance caring with their careers, and encourage employers to have the best family-friendly policies to attract top talent. That would be good for everyone.

6.35 pm

**Baroness Greengross (CB):** My Lords, I want to comment on the most neglected of all gender human rights issues—that of widows. In spite of the contribution

of many people, including in this House—in particular the noble Lords, Lord Loomba, Lord Hussain, Lord Bilimoria and many others, some of whom are here—and of organisations such as Widows for Peace through Democracy, led by the indefatigable campaigner Margaret Owen, there is a terrible lack of concern about widowhood.

Most women will experience widowhood at some point during their life, so this is not a niche issue. There is a myth that widows are mostly older women, but the number of widows of all ages is increasing across the world. This is because of armed conflicts, sectarian strife, natural disasters, age gaps in marriage and women living longer than men.

In many parts of the world, widows suffer violence through cruel mourning and burial rites. They face horrific and dehumanising practices, including being stoned to death for being witches, “ritual cleansing” through rape, and extreme restrictions on mobility, diet and clothing. In some societies, widowhood is a key driver of early marriage. Poverty often forces widows to remove their daughters from school, giving or selling them into early marriage. It often creates more child widows, who become vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation by criminal elements.

Millions of widows in Africa, south Asia, the Middle East and beyond are treated like chattels. When their husband dies, they are often denied inheritance, land and property rights. Many are chased off their land and made homeless, ending up in modern-day slavery. They are overrepresented in refugee camps, and often are the last to be resettled.

To date, widows have been barely mentioned in the CSW agreed conclusions since the UN Beijing declaration of September 1995, which called for equal rights for men and women. The 12 areas of action called for in the Beijing declaration all have relevance to widows, yet they remain invisible in these UN meetings and recommendations, despite intensive lobbying efforts from organisations representing them, some of which I have mentioned.

The UN 2030 sustainable development goals will not be met unless the issues of violence, poverty, vulnerability and abuse that widows face are seriously addressed. The UK, as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, is in a strong position to influence this change. The UK should use its position to lobby for a report on widowhood in conflict and the appointment of a special rapporteur on widowhood, and to push for a resolution on widowhood at the Security Council. I hope that these recommendations will be taken seriously by the new Ministers, who I congratulate. I particularly ask the Minister who will respond to confirm to me that this will happen.

6.39 pm

**Baroness Newlove (Con):** My Lords, I too welcome this debate. It was great to listen to my noble friend Lady Berridge’s opening speech, and I congratulate my noble friend Lady Sugg on her new role as Special Envoy for Girls’ Education. She will be fab.

All women must thank each other for their roles in life, whether as mothers at home—they do not get the recognition that they should—carers for loved ones or

city high-fliers. Instead of being negative, let us celebrate one another. Listening to such great speeches in your Lordships’ House, we could make a great encyclopaedia. We could be a force for women all over the world in the future. It is not constitutional, but it would be great to do a high-five at the end of this debate.

I feel privileged to take part in this debate and listen to noble Lords with great expertise and knowledge speaking from the heart. Above all, the dignity and respect that they show in speaking about such horrific topics is something to be proud of, because this is supporting equal rights for women. Working together is the only way to break down cultural mindsets and open doors.

We work in a great, historic building, yet at times the media ridicules it. History is very important. As one who loved history at school, I feel that, sadly, we now must fight for it. We must keep banging the drum for our history. Two years ago, I had the great privilege of listening to a speech by Helen Pankhurst, the great-granddaughter of Emmeline Pankhurst. Although known for the Suffragette movement, we need to understand what those women went through at the hands of the prison guards who force-fed them while they were on hunger strike. They went through the pain, horror and trauma of hunger strike, only to be tube-fed and go through that cycle of pain, horror and trauma again. We must understand this, as they fought for our right to vote today.

At the same time that Helen Pankhurst spoke, at the Women of the Year event in Birmingham, there was a keynote speech from actresses Sally Lindsay, a northerner who is in “Coronation Street”. She spoke of her woes at being a woman in a man’s world and about not fitting into the beauty criteria. She calls herself “a gobby northerner”—that is why I like her—and, more importantly, she was very down to earth, but being a woman in the acting world is not as simple as it appears on the screen. She also mentioned her documentary, “Emmeline Pankhurst: Making of a Militant”. It struck me how she wanted to see Emmeline as a person. What turned a loving mother into a militant general leading an army of women who changed the face of Britain? This great suffragette was ridiculed relentlessly, but when printed word for word, what she said is amazing, and would be seen today as a good PR coup.

Life then was so challenging, yet today, even with all our home comforts, women are still guilt-ridden, still being judged as bad role models when not seen to be doing what they are supposed to do. Taking politics out of this, Emmeline was a warrior and an activist and, never more so than now, her words are important as we see the #MeToo movement in America.

My noble friend Lady Secombe’s speech about toilets leads me to say that, as a Mancunian, I was amazed that in Manchester and other cities there were once no women’s toilets because it was frowned upon for women to be alone. If they were found alone, it was completely acceptable for the local police—any man, in fact—to assume that they were prostitutes and search them. I think that is illegal sexual abuse today. We speak of our high streets failing. Women’s toilets only came into existence when shops appeared, and they were designed by men. That is why, to this day,

[BARONESS NEWLOVE]

there are queues for women's toilets wherever we go but not for men's. Do not get me started on the prices of women's tights and men's socks; equality is still to come there.

People say that I am gutsy and inspiring, considering what my family and I suffered 12 years ago. While I truly am grateful, I am embarrassed at the same time: as a mother of three daughters, this was the only avenue I could take. It was not the one I personally wanted, because a duvet and a bottle of pills looked more inviting, given what I was going through. Over the years I have met many inspiring people—people who have been traumatised or abused, who have sought help and not found it but have given help to the most vulnerable. Two years ago, I was proud to chair the international Safeguarding Summit, with the support of the Minister and my noble friend Lord Bates, who is behind me and to whom I say, “high-five”. Listening to survivors of sexual abuse in our aid sector made me see another world. The films of their stories have never left me. As a mother, it is hard to think of a mother whose child is so hungry that she is raped to give that child a custard cream. What a society we live in.

I had the privilege of attending the UN a year later. I was invited by the victims' rights advocate, Jane Connors, to meet other rapporteurs—I love all these titles—and hear what happens on our global stage. I was delighted, because it was the end of my term as Victims' Commissioner. It is appalling that we talk about technology when that technology is used to kill, rape and abuse people.

Can the Minister ensure in her new role that no mother needs to be raped to feed her child? I know only too well that life is not a practice run. Life is precious, and it can change in seconds. I woke up a wife and went to bed that night a widow. I am proud of the woman I am, here in your Lordships' House, and I am very grateful to colleagues for their friendship. I went through hell to become that woman, standing here. My three daughters, Zoe, Danielle and Amy, my heroines, need to know that they are strong women because a strong woman raised them.

6.47 pm

**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP):** I welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, to her new role, and thank her for securing this debate. I compliment most strongly the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, on his excellent maiden speech, and urge all noble Lords to reflect on his words and his account. Today, at this moment, there are women—mothers—on the Turkey-Greece border and throughout the world—who are refugees in a similar situation. We, the UK, need to welcome a significant number of them here and see the contributions that they, like the noble Lord, can make.

I considered talking about so many topics today. Violence against women is one of the obvious ones to address. In the other place, the honourable Member, Jess Phillips, read out the names of more than 100 women killed by men in the UK in the last year. Will the Minister consider pressing the Government to ensure that misogyny is declared a hate crime, something that there is a very large campaign for? On a global scale,

more than 50,000 women a year are killed by a family member or intimate partner. Can we ensure that a significant portion of our aid money is directed to addressing and supporting women and men tackling that issue?

I considered talking about the world of work, about unpaid caring and domestic work that is so much a part of many women's lives. I echo the call from the noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock, for the Minister to consider increasing the carer's allowance, as it would improve the lives of so many women. Again, if we look on a global scale, young women today will, by the end of their lives, have done four years' more work than their male compatriots, a lot of it unpaid care work. When we think about our economic and development policies, let us think about the fact that gross domestic product does not take into account or value any of that.

Those were a couple of issues that I thought of talking about, but as a Green Peer, I guess there is something that I have to mention, which is women and the climate emergency—a topic on which I am asked to speak quite often, noble Lords will not be surprised to hear. There are some obvious points to be made. Women, as heavily overrepresented among the poor around the world, are hugely vulnerable to the climate emergency while having done almost nothing to contribute towards it. They have less access to resources and information, and in disasters related to the climate emergency, they are in more danger. They become climate refugees but sometimes they do not become climate refugees when actually they need to be. The inability to move, which disproportionately affects women, is a danger and threat to life that we need to acknowledge.

More positively, I also talk about the fact that women have knowledge and solutions to the climate emergency. Too often, that knowledge is neither respected nor acknowledged and I very much hope that our aid programmes and our approach on the international stage, particularly at COP 26, will value and support that knowledge being taken into the international efforts—knowledge about food production, household management, land management and social cohesion.

A few years ago when I was speaking at a Women's Environmental Network event, the parallels and similarities between the situation of people campaigning on the climate emergency and campaigning for women's rights really struck me. I reflected on the words of the wonderful feminist historian, Sheila Rowbotham, back in the 1970s that we thought when we won something, that was secure and we would move on to the next thing, but then we found that we had to keep fighting the same battles again and again. I draw real parallels with the efforts against the climate emergency. The Climate Change Act 2008 was a wonderful success and a great victory, but its results were not assured. The most recent report to Parliament of the Committee on Climate Change in July 2019 showed that the Government had delivered just one of 25 policies required to get UK emissions on track to meet the targets in the Climate Change Act.

The problem is that when we fight on individual issues, once that issue is apparently won, the momentum and energy head off in new directions and the system

reverts to status quo settings. It is increasingly clear that the problems identified by feminism and the problems seen by environmentalists are joined up. They are part of a system—a model—that is broken. It is an economic system that is trashing the planet while trampling all over the rights of women. Important as they are, picking off individual issues, such as misogyny as a hate crime or the recognition and valuing of unpaid caring work, is worth while, but at the same time we must make it clear that the system that created the inequalities has to be tackled—the causes as well as the symptoms of the great sicknesses of our society. That is the way in which we can join up feminism and environmentalism. As the saying goes:

“System change, not climate change”.

System change, not patriarchy.

6.54 pm

**Baroness Osamor (Lab):** My Lords, it is a great honour and privilege to participate in this very important debate secured by the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, on his moving maiden speech.

In Tottenham, in the London Borough of Haringey, where I come from, March 2020 is Women's History Month—it is not just International Women's Day but a whole month. I have the brochure for this month. It was launched on Sunday 1 March and events will go on until 31 March. There are two main topics for today, 10 March. One celebrates the life of Sophie Blanchard, the French aeronaut, from 1778 to 1819 and the second looks at women in Egypt, focusing on Cleopatra. Young people will be encouraged to follow history and look deep down to see what is missing—where women's achievements have been hidden.

I want today to represent black women who lived in Haringey in the past or walked along Tottenham High Road, either travelling northward or southward into London in the 1700s, the 1800s and 1900s. There are a few local black women in the historical record. Most would have been enslaved or servants, but certainly working-class women, whose existence left barely a scratch behind them. Only their names are in the parish register, but those registers are important. There are two records for black women in Tottenham. The register tells us, for example, that on 6 April 1790:

“Sarah Claret, wife of Robert, a negro”,

was buried in the graveyard of All Hallows' Church, Tottenham, the parish church. Like all poor people, she has no gravestone to her memory. Just out of interest, two years later, on 27 March 1762, there is an entry in the burial register for:

“Robert Claret, a negro aged 65.”

So here we have a family. We know that when Sarah Claret died, her husband would have walked behind her coffin into the parish church, which we can visit today, nearly opposite Bruce Castle Museum. He would have stood and watched her burial in the graveyard, then he would have walked home, either to the north or the south, along Tottenham High Road.

Similarly, there are records of another family. On 21 August 1762, there was a burial in All Hallows' Church of:

“John Hill, son of John and Mary, a negro, aged 14.”

On 4 July 1771, there is a further entry in the burial register:

“John Hill, a black aged about 78.”

Here is evidence of another family.

We have no idea what Sarah Claret and Mary Hill achieved in their lives, but that does not mean they are not worthy of remembrance. It calls for some imagination to conjure up the nature of their lives. A vast number of black women in Britain would have lived lives of great poverty. It was a struggle for bare survival for working-class people. There were no government benefits. That families survived took tremendous efforts by mothers and fathers. It is not known where these people lived, but we know that both women would have walked along Tottenham High Road. They would have possibly used the village pump on Tottenham Green to get water. The people of Tottenham would have known these families. Tottenham in the 18th century was just a ribbon development. There were houses, taverns, shops and almshouses on either side of the high road. Behind the houses to the east and the west were fields and farms. There was a small population.

Sarah Claret and Mary Hill could have been born in this country. We do not know their origins. They could have been brought directly to England from Africa by a sea captain. For example, in the All Hallows' baptism register of March 1718, it is written “John Cyras, Captain Madden's black”. These two women could have been brought from the plantations of the Caribbean islands under British control. Again, we shall never know more.

Tottenham High Road was a very busy road. Horses, coaches and pedestrians travelled the road. The people involved in those journeys were part of Haringey history—our history.

I end by telling noble Lords about a black woman who was a housekeeper in Edmonton, a free woman, originally from Barbados, who frequently travelled into London, where she rented a room full of amazing possessions. It is possible that she might have been a second-hand dealer. Ruth Thomas was her name. She died in 1745. I have to cut my speech short, so I conclude by saying that Ruth, Mary and Sarah are my ancestors. We have to consider that history must not exclude them from being part of our celebration of International Women's Day or the history of women in this country.

7.02 pm

**Baroness Gardner of Parkes (Con):** My Lords, this is an important day, and it is important that we are having this debate. I congratulate my noble friend Lord Ranger on his maiden speech.

I have been very involved in this subject because Jean Trumington appointed me to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, a position I enjoyed very much. It was an important position in many ways because all the small countries did not want to admit that there was any unpleasantness in their country at all. It was only when we took a stand and admitted that we had a problem with domestic violence that it gave them the courage and opportunity to feel that they could speak out. It was very good that we brought the subject up, and we had to think twice, very carefully, about it.

[BARONESS GARDNER OF PARKES]

The UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings were always in New York and we were seated alphabetically, so the UK was between the USA and the USSR. This was during the Cold War; whatever one said, the other contradicted. Then I would have to come in with something that resolved the two opinions and then the rest of the chamber would say, "Yes, fine." Then they would say, "Yes, we defer to the Shakespeare English." Anyone in this building would roar with laughter about "Shakespeare English" when I have a strong Australian accent, even after all these years. Nevertheless, it was a sign that the Australians were prepared to accept it as well.

It was important to do those things. In so many countries, the men did pretty well nothing. They would sit in the sunshine while the women worked at tilling the land. You had to do what you could for international women. When I was chairman of Plan International for some 12 years, we helped people in Latin America. There you had to feel that the people understood and would carry on and do whatever they had agreed to do. Usually they did, and they welcomed it.

It is very important for us not to be frightened. I must congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Gale, because what was said about her earlier is little more than the bare facts. She really has done a huge amount for women's affairs and is very genuine in her interest in them. I admire her for it. I went to a conference in Malta with her, which went very well indeed. I have nothing much to say, other than I have daughters—I have no sons—and they are into everything you would hope. It is so good to be drawing attention to this today.

7.05 pm

**Lord Loomba (CB):** My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baronesses, Lady Berridge and Lady Sugg, for the opportunity to speak today on a very important issue that does not lessen with time: equality for women and girls worldwide. It is an issue that has been at the forefront of Governments' agendas for decades, yet progress is disappointingly slow. Women do not have equality or parity with their male colleagues, relatives, friends and acquaintances.

One of the key ways to improve gender equality is by ensuring that women and girls have the right skills, education, training and access to capital to allow them to realise their potential, start up businesses, create successful companies and add to the national and global economy. This is the 21st century, yet statistics tell a story of undeniable gaps in pay for women across the globe. There are women who manage to carve out careers and input into the economy, but, on the other hand, women and girls all over the world suffer through discrimination, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, trafficking, prostitution and so on.

Unfortunately, the fate of a woman is even worse as and when she loses her husband. According to UN Women, there are 285 million widows around the world and, sadly, their number is increasing due to poverty, disease and conflict. Many of them are living below the poverty line. They are uneducated and cannot get a job. Therefore, they are dependent on their family members. Without going into too much detail, I can tell noble Lords that they are living a life of

modern slavery. I declare an interest as founder and chairman trustee of the Loomba Foundation. My noble friend Lord Bilimoria has been a big supporter of the Loomba Foundation from the beginning and I thank him.

One of the main aims of the Loomba Foundation is to help widows establish economic stability for themselves and their family by providing skills training so that they can support themselves. The training we do, such as supporting women to learn sewing skills so that they can start their own business, empowers them. It allows them, sometimes for the first time, to educate their children and provide for their families without fear of going hungry through reliance on others. The foundation also provides funding for the education of the children of widows, so they can ensure that their family misfortunes will not continue to the next generation by breaking the shackles of poverty.

The United Nations has called for action to mobilise economic justice and rights for all, gender equality and feminist leadership. These can be brought about by ensuring that all women, including widows, have access to education, the right skills training, and capital to allow them to start and grow businesses. Imagine a world with more females at the helm, in business and in government—it is something we should all strive to facilitate.

Widows are most vulnerable, as you just heard from the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross. They are victims of double discrimination as women and widows. The Loomba Foundation brought their plight to the attention of the United Nations. At its 65th General Assembly in 2010, the UN adopted 23 June as the United Nations International Widows Day. It is a day of effective action to raise awareness of the plight of widows around the world. It is a significant day, if I may say so, because on this very day my mother became a widow in India in 1954. I was 10 years old and saw first-hand the discrimination and suffering my mother faced. It was not her fault—she did not kill my father—yet she suffered at the hands of the community for the rest of her life until she passed away in 1992.

I would like to ask the Minister whether the Government have any plans to help unfortunate widows and unmarried girls in developing countries, through education and skills training, which the Loomba Foundation considers vital and most important. It would not only make them self-reliant but change the mindset of people around them, letting them live a decent and dignified life.

7.12 pm

**Baroness Crawley (Lab):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Loomba, and acknowledge the work he does on behalf of widows. Congratulations are due also to the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, who so effectively reminded us why we all miss our mothers.

It is always a pleasure to take part in International Women's Day and I welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, to her new post—I hope she enjoys it—and indeed the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg.

I acknowledge the work the Government are doing to support women, especially the long-awaited introduction of the Domestic Abuse Bill and the annual obligation

for employers to publish the gender pay gap in their companies. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that many women have been very hard hit by years of austerity, as my noble friend Lady Healy said in her excellent speech. Unless the Government get a grip on the problems for low-paid workers—many of them women—beyond what they have already published on statutory sick pay in this coronavirus crisis, many women in part-time and unprotected sectors could see very challenging times this summer and beyond.

I was interested that the UN is aligning this year's International Women's Day theme, "I am Generation Equality", with its campaign to mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. It took me back to the time I chaired the Women's Rights Committee in the European Parliament and we were preparing for our participation in that Beijing conference. The organisation UN Women has described the Beijing Declaration as

"the most progressive roadmap for the empowerment of women and girls everywhere."

Heady days!

It is a shame that another anniversary, last month, to celebrate 50 years of the Women's Liberation Movement and its first conference in Oxford was marred by the no-platforming of individuals. There is a need in the cacophony of online abuse of women and of misinformation to listen to each other calmly, not to no-platform each other.

Once again, International Women's Day shines a light on women's pay—many noble Lords referred to this. It is 50 years since the Equal Pay Act and, while the latest ONS statistics found that the gender pay gap among British employees decreased from 17.8% in 2018 to 17.3% in 2019, British women working full-time earn less, on average, than men across all sectors of our economy—even where women outnumber men in full-time work.

We know that women are more likely than men work in low-paid sectors but, even in sectors dominated by women, such as the caring and leisure professions, they often earn less than men. In fact, astoundingly, according to the ONS the only job sector in the whole economy where women are in a majority and earn slightly more than men is being a receptionist. This is 2020 in the western world.

Let me put in a word for the cross-party campaign I am involved in, to get justice for the war widows who have not been treated equally in their attempt to reinstate their pension rights. Their treatment has been shameful—we are talking about a few hundred, mostly older women who would have to divorce and remarry their present partner to get their pension reinstated—a pension they received on the death of their former partner, involved in conflicts such as the Falklands War, the first Gulf War and the Northern Ireland Troubles. They subsequently had to give up those pensions. I ask the Minister if she is able to tell us if the Government have rethought their position on this or if they are still hiding behind the principle of retrospection.

Finally, the World Economic Forum has said that it will take 99.5 more years to close the international gender gap in all aspects of life—across health, education,

economic participation and political empowerment—at the rate of progress we are seeing today. That is nearly 100 years; our work, it seems, is never done.

7.18 pm

**Baroness Mone (Con):** My Lords, I too thank the Minister for securing this important debate and I congratulate her on her new role. I am in slight awe of the knowledge and expertise in this House. It is such an honour to contribute to this debate. This is a chance to pause and reflect. Gender equality by 2030 still needs urgent action; there is lots to do, but also much to celebrate in how far we have come.

As others have mentioned, women's equality and empowerment is one of the 17 sustainable development goals. It is also, arguably, vital to the success of all of them. Therefore, it is important that this year's International Women's Day theme is "Each for Equal".

I want to focus my remarks on women and entrepreneurship. I draw attention to my interests as listed in the register and my previous role as start-up business tsar, leading the 2016 review entitled "Be the Boss" on boosting enterprise in more deprived communities.

I grew up in a one-bedroom tenement flat in the East End of Glasgow. Life was not easy at all. My brother died when he was a baby and my dad was confined to a wheelchair by the age of 38, so by the time I was 15 I decided to leave school and support my mum and dad. I always had a dream to start a business, and at the age of 24 I started my first one from my kitchen table. I went on to create one of the biggest brands in the world, with 17 world inventions. I have since sold it to one of the biggest intimate apparel companies in the world, employing 63,000 people. That is not bad for a wee girl from Glasgow.

I know how tough it can be to set up and run your own business, especially going back to work 48 hours after giving birth to my baby daughter, Bethany—but do not worry; she reminds me all the time when she wants something.

A truly modern and successful economy needs to be able to unleash the entrepreneurial energy and skills of everyone in society. Figures show that someone starts a new business in the UK every 75 seconds, yet only a third of entrepreneurs are women. We should not tolerate people being held back from achieving their dream of working for themselves and creating jobs for others simply because of their gender, where they are from or who they are.

I commend *The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship*, published this time last year. It highlighted that up to £250 billion of new value could be added to the UK economy if women started and scaled new businesses at the same rate as men. Why are women not taking the plunge? I will tell your Lordships why. One reason is that they have a lower level of access to finance. A woman's average starting capital is 50% below that of a man. They also have a different risk appetite, with 55% more women than men citing the fear of starting a business alone as a really scary thing. In addition, there is a perceived lack of skills and experience; imbalanced childcare

[BARONESS MONE]

responsibilities, with women spending 60% more time on childcare than men; a lack of sponsorship; and a real lack of role models.

I was struck by how similar the findings were to those of my own review. There is still a need for all of us to take steps to help want-to-be female entrepreneurs. Action must be taken, but how? Building up a woman's confidence is key, as is offering more income security, and building better business networks is vital. In response to the Rose review, the Government announced an ambition to increase the number of female entrepreneurs by 50% by 2030. That is nearly 600,000 additional female entrepreneurs. Can the Minister please update the House on where we are on implementing these recommendations?

As someone who has received guidance and is now a mentor myself, I can tell your Lordships how important it is to encourage women to take the plunge, work hard and follow their dreams, no matter who they are. I would not be here today without the support of the incredible Prince's Trust. It knows that self-employment can be a vital route to success for many from disadvantaged areas who are trapped by poor qualifications and few job opportunities.

The World Economic Forum's 2020 report found that the number of women in senior roles had increased in 2019. However, it stated that women's participation in the labour market is "stalling". We need to be more creative in business development and enterprise education, not just in the workplace but much earlier in the lives of our children. Building experiences of entrepreneurship into schools helps girls develop the skills and confidence they require so that eventually they can run their own businesses. Mary Anne Radmacher said:

"Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again tomorrow'."

As a Scot, I could not finish without offering your Lordships and all the female entrepreneurs out there—past, present and future—a shot of whisky. Slàinte!

7.25 pm

**Lord Young of Norwood Green (Lab):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Mone. I wholeheartedly concur with her about the importance of entrepreneurship as a way forward for many women. There is a lot of potential there.

I could not help reflecting that these are interesting times in which to celebrate International Women's Day, when the whole concept of gender is somewhat fluid and, some would say, up for debate. I must admit that I was looking forward to the noble Baroness, Lady Hunt, being here today, but unfortunately she is not. This is probably not the right place for me to pronounce on this issue—not that I do not have a view—but I agreed with my noble friend Lady Crawley when she pointed out the unfortunate habit of no-platforming people whose ideas we do not necessarily agree with. Surely what we need in any debate on this issue is the ability to listen to other points of view.

I, too, congratulate the noble Baronesses, Lady Berridge and Lady Sugg, on their new positions. I was particularly impressed by the point that the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, made about stereotypes in

relation to boys and girls and how those set in at an early age. Even at primary school, we need to teach boys to show respect for the girls in their classes. If we do not stop those attitudes, which start at an early age and which unfortunately are often reinforced by things that children access on the internet, they can lead to domestic abuse—a matter that we will try to deal with in the Domestic Abuse Bill. I am very pleased that the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, will be dealing with girls' education in developing countries.

I missed some of this debate, for which I apologise, but I heard one reference to Malala Yousafzai—an astonishing woman. I feel that we do not sufficiently pay tribute to her and the work that she has done. Apart from the incredible courage that she has displayed, she is the youngest Nobel laureate and has done much to inspire young people around the world. She is, of course, accompanied by another amazing young woman. I might not necessarily agree with all her views but you cannot help but admire the sheer determination of Greta Thunberg and the fact that she has inspired a lot of young people to understand the importance of climate change. They are important young women who have made a huge contribution and it is important to mention them as we celebrate International Women's Day.

As a former trade unionist, I shall focus a little on some of the important industrial disputes. A number of us are wearing ribbons recognising the importance of the matchgirls' strike in 1888 and are supporting the campaign for a memorial to recognise its importance. There were two other disputes. I think that it was the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, who mentioned the machinists at Dagenham. That was an important dispute—after all, it launched the Equal Pay Act. We ought to pay tribute to Barbara Castle, who supported them. What an amazing woman she was. Another dispute which is not often referred to was at Grunwick from 1976 to 1978. An Asian woman, Jayaben Desai, led a really difficult but important campaign. It did not end well. The women did not get the justice they deserved.

The older one gets the more one tends to turn to the newspaper obituary columns. I am perhaps as guilty of this as anyone else in your Lordships' House. I kept one I saw recently because it has a relevance to today's debate. It was of a woman I had not heard of—a brilliant NASA mathematician called Katherine Johnson. As John Glenn, the first American to orbit the earth, pored over the computer-generated data and decided that the numbers warranted a second opinion, he said, "Get that girl here. If she says they are good, I am ready to go". That girl was Katherine Johnson, a 43 year-old mother of three whose mathematical brilliance helped her to defy sexism and racism to become one of the most trusted human computers at NASA, the American space agency. She was an amazing woman. The obituary also mentioned how she tried to get into a meeting dominated by male engineers.

"Quietly the quality of my contribution began to outweigh the arbitrary laws of racial segregation and the dictates that held back my gender".

Johnson was assigned to the space task group which NASA established in 1958. Although trusted to work on top-secret projects as an important team member, she was never invited to the meetings by engineers.



One day she asked to attend a briefing and was told, "Girls don't go". When she pressed her case, asking if there was a law against it, her boss allowed her in. What a huge battle she had to fight.

A number of noble Lords have spoken about the importance of carers' allowances. There are more women at work and in full-time jobs, but there is still a long way to go on the question of equal pay. Although we have made progress, there is still a huge disparity. As we enter a difficult period for our economy, will the Minister think about the impact this is going to have on single working parents? We ought to be looking carefully at how universal credit operates. Will she give some consideration to this?

I am running out of time, but I want to pay tribute to the late Lady Rendell. She was an amazing woman and writer and a fearless campaigner concerning female genital mutilation. I also want to pay tribute to the late Lady Jowell. What an amazing contribution she made. Lady Dean was an astonishing woman. I met someone whom she had encouraged to go to Cambridge University.

I want to end by referring to another newspaper article. There is hope for humanity when, after 96 years, the Ilkley crown green bowling club has ended its ban on women members. By gum, that's progress.

7.33 pm

**Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Con):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Berridge for securing this important debate. I too congratulate her and my noble friend Lady Sugg on their new roles. I welcome my noble friend Lord Ranger to the House and congratulate him on his maiden speech. What an incredible woman his mother sounded—left with eight children on her own in that situation. It makes us all think.

Before I begin, I will draw attention to my various roles listed in the register of interests.

While, as we have heard, there is still no country in the world with true gender equality, we should be particularly proud of what the UK has done to try to help women and girls by highlighting the importance of gender equality and female empowerment at home and internationally. I hope that the Minister can reassure me that this work will continue.

There is so much I could talk about—we have heard about so many issues today—but I will focus on two particularly important issues. Women are not a homogenous group. Here in the UK, single older women are one of the most marginalised groups—ignored and voiceless. They suffer double discrimination—they are old and they are female. Older women in the UK are seen as a problem and a cost when they should be viewed as a hidden asset of enormous benefit to our society. Women never retire from unpaid, mostly caring, work but remain active and able often into their ninth and tenth decades. They live, on average, seven years longer than men so that, by the age of 85, more than 75% of women who have been married are widowed. We have already heard today about the plight of widows. There are 5.4 million people aged 75 and above and 14,000 centenarians, with women vastly outnumbering men. Society classes 65-plus women as old when, in reality, they have, on average, more than 20 years still to live.

Older women contribute much economic benefit to the UK, but it is uncounted and unacknowledged. Many grandmothers help with childcare so that family members can go back to work, or care for their elderly husbands. In addition, older women are often active in their community, helping with charities and, dare I say, politics. They organise events and act as the glue in community cohesion. They nearly always work for free and with little appreciation. We need to do more to recognise the contribution of older women and help maximise their role in our society. Staying healthy, active and involved helps stave off loneliness and reduces depression and mental health problems such as dementia. We need to do more on earlier identification and intervention to keep people at home, leading a fuller life for longer.

It is often a shock to families to find that chronic conditions are not covered on the NHS. Others have touched on the issue of carers. Staying at home or in a care home can be incredibly expensive. I hope that the Government are seriously looking at assisting with this. It is not easy, but it is important. I hope that the Government's Ageing Society Grand Challenge will help but, most of all, we need to change our approach and attitude to ensure that our elderly are more cherished in society and not ignored or put on the rubbish dump of life.

I should also like to draw the House's attention to the present situation of women in Afghanistan. Forty years of conflict have disproportionately affected them, and it is still one of the worst countries in the world in which to be a woman. Domestic violence is incredibly high—some say over 85%. One in five girls gets married before the age of 15 and almost 50% are married by the age of 18. Many are still illiterate.

However, since 2001, progress has been made. Under the Taliban, there was a mantra that a woman's place was in the home or in the grave. When they were in government, almost no girls went to school. Today, this has changed. There is equality in the constitution and, in spite of threats, many women in Afghanistan now take part in public life. There are Afghan women in their armed forces and the police. They are judges, ambassadors, lawyers, doctors, civil servants, MPs and Ministers. There can be no doubt that long-term stability and prosperity in Afghanistan will be enormously aided by women being able to make a full contribution to business, political and civic life. There has been much in the news recently about the US Government having signed a peace process with the Taliban—but there is not a woman in sight.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the groundbreaking Security Council Resolution 1325. Women need to be included in the peace process. Peace cannot be built in a country by leaving half the population out. We have encouraged Afghan women to come forward. How are we going to protect them from the brutality of the Taliban, who often target and kill prominent females? Can the Minister reassure me that the UK Government will demand that women are included in any ongoing peace talks, thus ensuring that their rights are upheld and they can have their rightful say in Afghanistan's future?

As others have highlighted, 2020 is a landmark year for gender equality. I hope that the UK Government

[BARONESS HODGSON OF ABINGER]  
will continue actively to support women and gender-equality agendas both at home and abroad. As Gloria Steinem said:

“A gender-equal society would be one where the word ‘gender’ does not exist: where everyone can be themselves”.

7.39 pm

**Baroness Goudie (Lab):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow my good friend the noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson, who has worked with me on a number of issues. I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, on her appointment, and I am very excited by the appointment of the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, who I think could really deliver a lot for us across the divide. I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, on his speech. It is always hard making your first speech, because in this House you know that everybody knows much more than you do about what you are going to say.

I must also say to my noble friend Lord Young that Grunwick played a long part in my life in the early 1970s, when I was a councillor in Brent and Grunwick was in the Roundwood ward. I was assisting a housing association whose residents had problems because the gardens were being trampled by the pickets, although I was on the side of the pickets. It was a long, complicated trial, in which we did not do well in the end, but it was an important dispute in history that took things much further.

Some of my colleagues feel that this women's agenda is finished. I am sorry, but it has a long, long way to go. I am tired of people telling me—inside this House and wherever I go—that these International Women's Days have to cease, as there are other things to focus on. I feel that this has been one of the nicest International Women's Day debates in this House, and we have to continue them because there is a whole agenda to be taken forward. We have accomplished a lot, but we have a long way to go.

This year's International Women's Day theme is “Generation Equality: Realising Women's Rights”. Given that focus, this is a key time to look ahead and consider how to engage women across the generations and across the world. In addition, 2020 is the 25th anniversary of the Beijing platform and the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

The Beijing platform meant a lot to all of us in this Chamber, and I remember watching the films and later seeing the videos. My great friend, whom all of you know, Ambassador Melanne Verbeke was there, along with Hillary Clinton. They took forward the agenda, which is the agenda that we are still working on today. When I spoke with them about this evening's debate and asked where we are going on women, peace and security and on the whole question of Afghanistan, they told me about their meeting in Washington.

As you will see when that is published, they talked about what it is like to live in a place where, as a woman, you are not allowed to be at the peace table; I will come back to that in a moment. You are living in a war-torn area where thugs and terrorists are gaining everything, your children are being murdered and there is no food. That applies not only to Afghanistan but to Syria, Sudan and the Congo.

Like my noble friend, I ask the Minister, following the undertaking given by the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay, when she was Minister, that we should not allow Britain to be at any peace table without us having women there. We should sit outside and insist on that, just as the women of Northern Ireland and the women of Colombia sat outside. Because they sat outside—and they took it in turns doing so—they were able to be invited in.

We happen to be lucky that, both in Colombia and in Northern Ireland, we had people who were enlightened and who understood that we need not just women like us but local women sitting at the peace table. The local women know what is required, whereas the boys will say, “Oh fine, we are sorry, we'll go away.” They forget about education, further education and health; they forget about everything that matters—including investment. Without any of those, those countries cannot survive, and the peace talks do not last. Colombia and Northern Ireland are the only places where the peace talks lasted for any length of time.

So we must continue with that promise that we will not be at peace talks without women. We must be there because—despite what is happening—we are a leading country in the field of women, peace and security. We lead the field in general peace and in education across the world, and we are going to lead on girls' education and boys' education.

Furthermore, as I raised in the House some while ago, we should use the DfID budget and some Foreign Office money to take the lead on women's and girls' health around the world, and in particular on maternal health. I hope that, in the talks on trade, the USA do not try to do to us as they have done to other countries by saying, “If you give maternal health advice, abortion advice and family planning advice, there will be no deal—we will not play with you.” I have seen some of the letters they send, so I ask for an undertaking on that.

We also need to look at a new approach, with a feminist foreign policy, which we need to take forward. Without women being involved in every part of foreign policy, we will not get the true foreign policy agenda. Gender equality is central to this framework and underscores that men and women, boys and girls, must interact together and work together to have the kind of society that is important to us and to address power imbalances.

We talked earlier today about representation of women in Parliament. The representation of women in parliaments around the world is terrible, but we have to remember that women are selected by their constituency party under their party's rules. As I have said before, the Labour Party and the Liberals took the risk of having all-women shortlists, and it worked out. I am not in favour of quotas—as you all know—but sometimes you have to try that, and we have to encourage other countries to do the same.

Also, we know that in countries of war, things are different because it is agreed that there should be a 50:50 parliament, and that is right. However, in the situation that we are in, we also have to try to achieve that. If we look at the situation in America and in some European countries, the imbalance is terrible.

We should look at ground-breaking ideas from countries such as Canada and Switzerland, which have an enlightened global policy and a feminist policy.

As my friend and yours, my noble friend Lady Armstrong, said to me today, “Well, Mary, it’s not just a feminist foreign policy that we need to look at but a feminist budget.” I know that some people around the world are looking at that, and that is what we must have, so that we are working together, and that we are at every peace table.

As one of the last speakers, if I continue, I will only be repeating what everyone else has said.

7.47 pm

**Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD):** My Lords, International Women’s Day does not belong to any single country or group or organisation—it is global and it is for all of us—and that has been reflected in the wide range of excellent speeches that we have heard today.

Let me be the latest, if not quite the last, to welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge—I am really looking forward to working with her—and I welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, to her new role as Special Envoy for Girls’ Education. I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, on the inspiring story of his mother. From his comments, he is obviously proud of her, and I am sure that she would be incredibly proud of him.

I shall try to group the contributions that we have heard. Women in politics featured in several speeches. The noble Baronesses, Lady Jenkin and Lady Fall, spoke about their hard work to redress the imbalance in the Conservative Party—and well done them. The noble Baroness, Lady Jenkin, talked about founding Women2Win, and the noble Baroness, Lady Fall, reminded us of the chauvinistic atmosphere that still pervades in politics and puts so many women off. Women now represent 34% of seats in the Commons, and we have a long, long way to go in the Lords.

The noble Baroness, Lady Newlove, went back to the earliest struggles, including the suffragettes and women’s toilets—we have all had the experience of queuing for toilets designed by men. Talking about history, the noble Baroness, Lady Osamor, painted a fascinating picture of the lives and deaths of some of the first black women in Haringey—her ancestors in fact.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, talked about the climate emergency, as we would expect, and compared the struggle to that which women face every day to achieve equality. Feminism and environmentalism in this respect are one and the same. We talked about women in work and the strike by the match girls—who were inspirational path-blazers, if you will pardon the expression. The noble Baronesses, Lady Gale and Lady Bryan, and my noble friend Lady Pinnock talked movingly about poverty and its effects on carers, low-paid workers and pensioners.

On women’s start-ups, we heard incredible examples of how the odds are stacked against us—yet, certainly, the noble Baroness, Lady Mone, sets a trail that we would all wish every aspiring entrepreneur to follow. The noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, talked about the value of diversity in business, with 33% more profitability

for diverse businesses. The noble Baroness, Lady Rock, talked about women in tech, and the noble Baroness, Lady Bull, about women in the creative industries. The noble Baronesses, Lady Wilcox and Lady Nye, talked about women in STEM. I totally agree about how important it is that we acknowledge the potential of 50% of our society. The noble Baroness, Lady Benjamin, spoke passionately and gave a disturbing description of online abuse and the need for age-verification for access to pornography. The noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley, talked about women in business and women leaving work early before reaching their full potential as “the broken rung on the corporate ladder”; I might borrow that expression if the noble Baroness does not mind.

We have had lots of contributions from men—very supportive men. We thank them all. It is no good if we talk only to each other or ourselves. I appreciated the contributions from the noble Lords, Lord Razzall and Lord Young. The noble Lord, Lord Bates, talked about how women are less good than men—at violence and other forms of crime. He is himself a wonderful role model of how a man can command great respect from women. The noble Earl, Lord Shrewsbury, and the noble Viscount, Lord Waverley, talked about the right—or rather what is not so much the right—of primogeniture.

Poverty was a strong theme, including in the contributions from my noble friend Lady Pinnock, and the noble Baronesses, Lady Healy and Lady Crawley. Carers featured in several contributions, with my noble friend Lady Pinnock and the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, talking about benefits for the greatest numbers. Menopause featured heavily in the remarks of the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy; I wonder what the situation would be if men had to go through the menopause—that is just a thought, colleagues. The noble Baroness, Lady Chisholm, tackled the special problems faced by women in rural communities: loneliness, poverty and paucity of care services.

Looking at overseas issues, the noble Baronesses, Lady Anelay and Lady Goudie, spoke about international development work and my noble friend Lord Hussain talked about the crimes perpetrated against women in Kashmir.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Cox and Lady Greengross, and the noble Lord, Lord Loomba, talked about the contributions of older women, including widows overseas, and development work with women in their communities. The noble Baroness, Lady Nye, talked movingly about the Rohingya women and their suffering, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson, about women in Afghanistan. The noble Baroness, Lady Gardner, told us stories about her time as a women’s commissioner.

Several colleagues in the House, including the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester, mentioned the Domestic Abuse Bill. We welcome the Bill and the changes made to it as a result of the recommendations of the cross-party consultation group, which have been incorporated into its next iteration. I am very happy that a duty will be imposed on local authorities to provide refuge for victims, but that needs to be funded properly. There is currently a huge shortfall, with 60% of women who approach hostels and refuges today being turned away.

[BARONESS BURT OF SOLIHULL]

The Equality and Human Rights Commission makes three recommendations, which we will be supporting from these Benches. First, it calls for a widening of public authorities' duty to provide refuge services, to include non-accommodation-based services as well as accommodation. As I said earlier, 1.6 million women are affected by domestic violence each year. Thankfully, they do not all need refuges, but they do need other specialist services. The EHRC recommends that the statutory duties should incorporate other specialist services, and there should be a corresponding duty on the Secretary of State to provide the funding to ensure effective implementation. Secondly, the EHRC says that the Bill in its current form leaves those with insecure immigration status without protection and support. These are the most vulnerable people in society. Does the Minister agree that all victims of abuse should be offered support, no matter who they are and regardless of their immigration status?

I have some suggestions that I hope the Minister will feel able to support. In the context of domestic abuse, I draw her attention to the Citizens Advice campaign asking BEIS to fund an "address and collect" service, similar to the post office box service, provided at post offices. Research by Citizens Advice found that half of the survivors of domestic abuse had had their post intercepted. It also estimated that survivors have lost £7.1 billion over the last 10 years through post interception. Arguably worse, 40% of survivors who have fled the abuse have had their new addresses disclosed by an agency, such as a hospital or local authority; 71% of those affected had their safety compromised as a result. Under "address and collect" the applicant would receive an address location that they could use, and their post would be redirected to a post office, to be collected at a time convenient for them. This would overcome some of the barriers to accessing essential services and help to ensure safety. Will the Minister use her good offices to ask BEIS to consider funding such a service? It is the Budget tomorrow—you never know your luck.

My second ask relates to discrimination against women. They pay £200 per year extra for the same everyday goods as men which have been orientated towards women. This has been labelled the "pink tax"; the Gender-based Pricing (Prohibition) Bill tabled by my colleague in the Commons, Christine Jardine, is supported by Members right across the Commons. It would address this gender discrimination by making it illegal for companies to make a surcharge for goods aimed at women but used by both sexes. Personally, I have never felt tempted to buy a pink razor but it seems criminal to me that women should be exploited in this way. Will the Minister again use her good offices to ensure that the Government consider supporting this Private Member's Bill?

My third ask is about pay. I wholly endorse the comments made by the noble Baroness, Lady Prosser, about shared parental leave and the right to know. We know that eight out of 10 companies still pay men more than women. A major reason for this is lack of pay transparency as there is no right to know. Even if you suspect that a male colleague doing the same work

is being paid more, you may have to go to court to find out. We had a discussion on this in Questions earlier today. The Government committed in 2019 to review the enforcement of equal pay legislation. Could the Minister have a quiet word with her colleagues to see whether this could be recommended as the next stage in shining a light on the dark malpractices that still frustrate our struggle for pay equality?

I finish very quickly with a good news story from Southeastern and Great Western Railways, which offer free train travel to victims fleeing an abusive relationship under a new scheme they invented—"rail to refuge". Under the scheme, abuse victims can contact the charity Women's Aid, or a domestic abuse helpline or local outreach service; if necessary, a refuge space will be found for them and a train ticket obtained on the woman's behalf. This is true corporate social responsibility in action.

I close with the words of the Baroness, Lady Goudie, who said that this has been one of the nicest International Women's Day debates. That is because we are all on the same page, quite literally.

7.59 pm

**Baroness Thornton (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the Minister, the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, for opening this debate and I welcome her to her new role. As ever on International Women's Day we have had a treasure trove of a debate, with the diamond in the middle of the maiden speech of the noble Lord, Lord Ranger. You know what they say about diamonds. The noble Lord brings to the House a wonderful, interesting and unique experience, which I think we will all find most valuable as time passes.

I realise that the Minister will tell us when she sums up this debate—I wish her good luck in doing that—about the great record of this Government in their support for women in many different ways, because that is her job. Indeed, she can be proud of their record compared with that of previous Conservative Governments over many years who voted against any equality legislation. I hope that she will also reflect on the many accounts we have heard today of the challenges that women in the UK face. This is a rich, civilised country with mostly enlightened views on equality and discrimination, but there is still some way to go.

I start by thanking my noble friends Lady Gale, Lady Bryan, Lady Donaghy, Lady Prosser, Lady Wilcox, Lady Nye, Lady Healy, Lady Osamor, Lady Crawley, Lady Goudie and our honorary sister, my noble friend Lord Young, for great contributions and for showing the deep, broad and very practical equality traditions of the Labour movement, going back to the match girls, the Durham women, the Grunwick women, the Ford women and the parliamentary pioneers such as Harriet Harman and Barbara Castle, of whom we are very proud indeed.

My contribution will reflect on "invisible women", using the title that Caroline Criado Perez used for her ground-breaking research and publication of that name, which I am sure many Members of the House will have read, or certainly read about. It describes and illustrates the gender data gap and data bias in a world designed for men and allows us to say with some

accuracy that we live in a male-dominated world in almost every aspect we care to examine—culture, art, music, science and government.

As we all know, enlightenment and knowledge are the first step along the road to change, so this is not a counsel of despair but a plea to understand and change. I recommend reading this book to those who have not done so; I particularly recommend it to those who make decisions about how to spend money and make senior appointments. As Simone de Beauvoir said:

“Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.”

It is important to say from the outset that the gender data gap is not deliberate or malicious; it is the product of a way of thinking that has been around for millennia. Sometimes it is not thinking; it is a gap, an absence, a non-collection of data. I shall relate two examples to illustrate this.

The first one, which we know and are very familiar with, is the issue of who should feature on the new bank note, replacing the only female figure with another man. As we know, Caroline Criado Perez led a successful campaign for that not to happen. In the process, some men got so angry that they threatened her with rape, mutilation and death. Even those men who were more measured in their displeasure showed that they were experiencing anger because even minor female representation was an iniquity. The interesting question is how the Bank of England came to this conclusion. It set up a series of objectives which it said would reflect merit. It set up objective selection criteria—we all read that it said this at the beginning—and said that the person it would choose had to be a key figure from the past, had to have name recognition, had to have good artwork, to be uncontroversial, had to have made a lasting contribution and to be universally recognised and enduring. So it was not surprising that it ended up with five white men on the shortlist. It is a good illustration of the historical gender data gap which means that women are far less likely to fulfil those criteria. It is not that the Bank of England deliberately set out to exclude women—indeed, I hope that it will have looked at its objective criteria and taken a different view.

Another example in the book concerns snowploughs in Sweden. In 2011, a town called Karlskoga in Sweden decided to re-evaluate its policies and practices through a gender-equality lens. One presumably slightly jaundiced official said that at least snow clearing would be “something that the gender people would keep their noses out of.” Of course, that guaranteed that the gender lens would be focused on this essential service. Every year, snow clearing started with the main arterial roads and ended with the clearance of pedestrian walkways, cycle paths and so on. Noble Lords can see this coming: women walk more than men do, we take more diverse routes to work, to schools and shops, while the men were largely driving their cars to work and back again. The outcome was that more women fell over on the snow and ice, broke their arms and legs and hurt themselves. It was shown that snow clearing was in fact not gender neutral at all. It did not cost much to reverse those things, and it is clear that it is

much easier to drive through three inches of snow than push a buggy through it. It saved a lot of money, because women were not going to accident and emergency, were not having to be mended and did not have to take time off work. I do not need to go into the detail because noble Lords can read about it.

The most telling matter—it was referred to by the noble Baroness, Lady Rock—is how the missing gender data impacts on a world increasingly dependent on big data: big truths dependent on big algorithms using big computers. If half the data that should be there is simply absent, it will have big consequences. As noble Lords know, I deal with health issues in this House. Gender bias can affect women in countless ways, but the gender health gap is putting women's lives at risk. Seat belts, head rests and airbags in cars have been designed mainly based on data collected from car crash dummies using the physique and seating positions of men. Women's breasts and pregnant bodies do not feed into the standard measurements, with the result that women are 47% more likely to be seriously injured and 17% more likely to die than a man in a similar accident.

Medical trials have been found to exclude representative samples of women—including pregnant women, women in menopause and women using birth control pills—which may result in medical advice that is not necessarily suitable for females. Women who suffer heart attacks are dying needlessly because they fail to recognise their symptoms and they receive poorer care. The British Heart Foundation found that, over 10 years, more than 8,000 women in England and Wales died unnecessarily after a heart attack because of inequalities in diagnosis, treatment and aftercare.

Online apps based on data collected mainly from men have also been found to suggest that a woman's symptoms of pain in the left arm and back might be due to depression, and that she should see a doctor in a couple of days. In contrast, a male user of the app is more likely to be asked to immediately contact his doctor based on a diagnosis of a possible heart attack.

A 2018 study by the University of Pennsylvania showed that women are less likely to receive cardiopulmonary resuscitation from bystanders during a cardiac arrest. This has been attributed to the fact that CPR training uses only male dummies. Training with female dummies would eliminate fears of causing injury, and the misconception that breasts make CPR more challenging. Verbal memory tests used to detect Alzheimer's disease disadvantage women. Research in the United States shows that women in the early stages of Alzheimer's perform better than men in these tests. However, as this difference is not taken into account, the disease is detected later in women, preventing earlier treatment.

As these examples show, when products, medication, training and advice cater predominantly for men or are based on male profiles, terrible things can happen. Tackling the entrenched gender divide in health is key to saving lives, by ensuring that essential products and services meet the needs of both women and men. This is about women stepping out of the shadows and claiming their data and presence, and increasingly I think we will see that this will make more progress.

[BARONESS THORNTON]

I would like to end by thanking everyone who has spoken in this debate. I note that we had nine blokes taking part, which is more than usual and might be a record; I welcome that and thank every one of them. As my noble friend Lady Gale said at the outset, the Government need to take further action to move towards equality. My noble friend asked many questions; many noble Lords have asked questions. What they have showed is that we have come a long way, but we still have some way to go.

8.10 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development (Baroness Sugg) (Con):** My Lords, I thank every Member of the House who has attended the debate and contributed today. We have heard some very powerful messages from across the Chamber, and I am really pleased to be closing the debate. It is important to use the opportunities presented to us on International Women's Day and other days like this, to ensure that the issue of gender equality really gets the attention it deserves in this place, and elsewhere.

Sadly, time definitely does not permit me to highlight all the good works which noble Lords and noble Baronesses have done, and continue to do, to improve the lives of women and girls in this country and around the world. I am delighted that my noble friend Lord Ranger has used this opportunity to make his maiden speech—a diamond, indeed. I congratulate him and welcome him to his place in the House. I am also pleased that my noble friend was joined by eight other noble Lords speaking today. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Razzall, and others that it is really important to hear men's voices on this issue, not just women's—it affects us all. We should all agree that next year we must do better. Achieving balance is, of course, in everyone's interest.

With each year, we do make progress on gender equality; we should celebrate that, and International Women's Day is a celebration. But with that celebration comes the caveat that more progress is evidently needed, and that has been made clear today. I can assure your Lordships that the Government are determined to push for change, and we know that we cannot be complacent.

Noble Lords have managed to cover a really impressive breadth of ground; I think I had written a 25-minute speech after the first 10 speakers. I shall do my best to address all the points, but I may speed up as I get towards the end.

Many noble Lords and noble Baronesses have spoken of the violence that women and girls still suffer in this country, and much of that is domestic abuse. The home should be a place of safety and comfort. My noble friend Lady Gardner explained how important it is that we admit this and are transparent about it in this country. The Government have taken action to help victims of domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, stalking—the many issues which affect many women in this country. This time last year we published a refreshed violence against women and girls strategy to reaffirm that commitment. As many noble Lords and noble Baronesses have highlighted,

last week we reintroduced the Domestic Abuse Bill, which is supported by our comprehensive action plan of non-legislative measures directed to help end domestic abuse. The Government are fully committed to working with both Houses to ensure its swift passage.

The noble Baroness, Lady Gale, asked about recognising the gendered nature of domestic abuse. We want to ensure that all victims and all types of domestic abuse are sufficiently covered, and that no victim is inadvertently excluded from protection or access to services. But, as the Joint Committee's report on the Domestic Abuse Bill recommends, we fully recognise that domestic abuse is a gendered crime, which disproportionately affects women and girls, and has a devastating impact on children. The noble Baroness also asked about the ratification of the Istanbul convention, and, as she knows, we publish an annual report on progress towards that ratification. We remain committed to the ratification of the convention as soon as practicable. The Domestic Abuse Bill contains the necessary measures to satisfy some of those needs.

The noble Baroness, Lady Burt, asked about long-term housing for survivors of domestic abuse, and we are committed to ensuring that all victims of domestic abuse receive the support that they need, when they need it. This includes having a safe place to stay, with specialist support to rebuild their lives. On the appropriate funding for migrants and refugees, we will of course ensure that local authorities get appropriate financial support to meet the proposed new duty. I will have to come back to her on the address and collect point, but I join her in welcoming the train tickets, which is a brilliant initiative—more of that, please.

Domestic abuse is also linked to female offenders, an issue that the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester raised. As we know, almost 60% of female offenders have experienced domestic abuse, and more than a third of them have a problem with a current partner. We are committed to doing all we can to address the issues around female offending, so that we can better protect the public and deliver more effective rehabilitation.

The noble Baroness, Lady Benjamin, is absolutely right that we must reinforce current case law, that a person cannot consent to violence that leads to serious injury or death. We are looking very carefully at how best to achieve that, but I am entirely in agreement with her. I also want to take the opportunity to mention something that we were highlighting on Sunday, International Women's Day—the domestic abuse helpline relaunch, with Refuge. This is a free service providing confidential information and expert support; many women changed their Twitter handle to the number on Sunday, and we are really pleased that that is up and running.

On the many issues faced by women at work, I recognise that there is a range of problems, identified by many today, that negatively impact women in the workplace. As the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, predicted, I am going to say that the Government are taking action to see greater equality and fairness at work. We have strong laws against workplace harassment already set out in the Equality Act, and we launched a consultation last summer to see how they could be

improved. We are also ensuring that employers are clear on their responsibilities, including supporting the Equality and Human Rights Commission to develop a statutory code of practice. In addition, the law is absolutely clear that pregnancy and maternity discrimination is unlawful. We have committed to reform redundancy law so that employers cannot discriminate against new mothers on their return to work.

Many noble Lords and noble Baronesses have raised the important issue of the gender pay gap. It is at a record low, but there is still some way to go. I welcome the intention of the noble Baroness, Lady Prosser, to bring this vital issue to the forefront as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act. We are looking very carefully at her proposals and the question of damages that she raised; we will use this year to reflect on what more needs to be done. I am pleased that she will meet my noble friend the Minister to discuss this further. As the noble Baroness, Lady Crawley, said, nearly 100 years to get here is far too long.

My noble friend Lady Penn and others spoke about flexible working and the importance of shared parental leave. We have recently closed the consultation on that; we consulted on increasing transparency, flexible working policies and reforming parental leave and pay to allow both parents to play a greater role in childcare. I am afraid that we are still working through the responses on that but will come forward with something on it in due course. We have committed to make it easier for fathers to take paternity leave, as set out in the 2019 manifesto—not just because the Prime Minister now has a personal interest in that. We are working through those responses and will introduce an employment Bill following consideration of them. I do not want to pre-empt that work. Flexible working, as the noble Baroness, Lady Healy, highlighted, needs to be part of ensuring that women can access work as, when and how they need it.

My noble friend Lady Rock and the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, spoke about data and tech. I agree that much more needs to be done to get women into tech. I will pass on her excellent ideas on this to the Office for Students; as my noble friend highlighted, we have a number of programmes on this. The noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, highlighted the seriousness of this; there is an amusing side to it but gender-biased data is also serious in its impact on women's health. There are huge opportunities, as my noble friend pointed out, for us in the fourth industrial revolution, but we need to make sure that we champion gender equality as part of that. The work with the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation is commendable; it plays a vital role in advising the Government on the measures we need to take.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Wilcox and Lady Nye, spoke about the importance of apprenticeships. We need to make sure both that apprenticeships are accessible to everyone and that there is a good gender balance in them. I am delighted that our new Apprenticeships Minister was a female apprentice in her time. She will be a great champion for that. We have a Fire It Up campaign featuring apprentices from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Many noble Lords and noble Baronesses spoke about the importance of encouraging women and girls into STEM. We must highlight role models more; we do it already but need to do it more. The noble Lord, Lord Young, spoke about the incredible Katherine Johnson. We all know that you cannot be what you cannot see, so we need to do more work on that.

My noble friend Lady Mone spoke of entrepreneurship. The Treasury has published the Alison Rose review and we are working very closely with industry to implement its recommendations, including the launch of a new voluntary investing in women code, increasing the transparency of support given to female entrepreneurs. This takes me back to the point about role models. We are very lucky to have my noble friend in our Chamber, who is of course an excellent role model and an inspiration to many women and men who want to get into entrepreneurship and start their own business.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Prosser, highlighted, the difference in the ways men and women participate in the labour market, whether taking time out or working part time, is the biggest driver of the gender pay gap. I entirely agree with my noble friend Lord Ranger that the economic empowerment of women is a necessity, not a choice. We continue to support families with their childcare costs and plan to spend more than £3.6 billion in 2021 to support our early education entitlements.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bull, highlighted the consequences of gender inequality in our creative industries and the fact that those consequences go well beyond that industry. We are determined to open up the creative sector to all and are working with key industry bodies and stakeholders such as the BFI and Ofcom to boost diversity across the sector.

The noble Lord, Lord Razzall, spoke about the importance of sport. We have had the great campaign This Girl Can since 2015 to ensure that more women take part in sport. I share the noble Lord's love of cricket and am delighted that the MCC is now open to women—sadly I have not reached those heady heights, nor those of the Ilkley Bowling Club. While we are on cricket, I was really pleased to see that the prize fund of the new Hundred game will be split equally between men and women. Again, more of that please.

Many noble Lords raised political representation, including the noble Baronesses, Lady Gale and Lady Pinnock, and my noble friend Lady Fall. We have more women MPs than ever before, which is great, but we need to ensure that we have more. Of course women must have an equal vote and voice in the decisions that affect them. The centre of Parliament, as my noble friend Lady Fall, said, must reflect reality. I also take this opportunity, as others have, to thank my noble friend Lady Jenkin for all the work she has done for the Conservative Party—not least in organising us for the march on Sunday—and her constant support and mentoring to many women in Parliament, including myself. I am grateful to my noble friend Lady Fall for her excellent speech on the challenges that still face women in politics and public life. Part of that means courtesy and respect for those with differing views, as the noble Baroness, Lady Crawley, and the noble Lord, Lord Young, highlighted.

[BARONESS SUGG]

I was also pleased to hear the noble Baroness, Lady Wilcox, speak of the revolution of the noble Baroness, Lady Gale, which my noble friend Lady Gardner also acknowledged. The noble Baroness, Lady Gale, also asked about Section 106 of the Equality Act. We have the most gender and LGBT-diverse Parliament ever. That is to be welcomed but, as I say, we have much more to do in keeping Section 106 under review. We will continue to encourage political parties to report on a voluntary basis. Ultimately, however, we believe that it is for parties to ensure that they select a diverse range of candidates and that the selection process is responsive to the barriers that we know. That is the way to improve diverse presentation. However, it is good to hear of successes we have had—we just need more of them.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, talked about making misogyny a hate crime. We have asked the Law Commission to undertake a review of the coverage and approach to hate crime legislation, which will include questions of whether we need further protected characteristics, including on sex and gender.

My noble friend Lady Bottomley spoke of the importance of supporting women throughout their career, avoiding the broken rung on the career ladder. Like the noble Baroness, Lady Burt, I may steal that one. We have to make sure that there is no glass ceiling that prevents women reaching the top, as well as ensuring that we support them all the way through. My noble friend mentioned the Hampton-Alexander review, which aimed to get 33% of women on boards. The FTSE 100 has achieved its target ahead of schedule, which is good news, but we should all ensure that everyone involved redoubles their efforts on all those other targets. My noble friend also spoke about Athena SWAN; widening access and participation to higher education remains a priority, and initiatives such as Athena SWAN are seeing advances in gender equality and in improving the representation of women in academia.

Many noble Lords and Baronesses have spoken of the match-girl strikers. As the noble Baroness, Lady Bryan of Partick, made clear, acknowledging women's history is important, and it was good to speakers highlight the match-girl strikers today. I was also pleased to hear from the noble Baroness, Lady Osamor, about the Women's History Month and the work she is doing to ensure that the people she mentioned are not forgotten.

As my noble friend Lady Newlove said, we must remember the experience of the suffragettes, who fought so hard to give us female politicians the opportunities we have today, and I am grateful for the education on the history of women's toilets. I will add my name to the long list of admirers of my noble friend and I pay tribute to her work for victims, on safeguarding and for women everywhere.

My noble friend Lady Hodgson spoke of the need to recognise the role of older women. It is important that the Government support older women in the particular challenges they face, not only because they are important in and of themselves—of course they are—but because we know that with demographic change, older women and men will be a far larger share of our population in the future.

There is good news to share: we know that women aged 50 to 64 have seen the largest increases in employment, but that comes with new challenges, as the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, highlighted. It is important that we give the implications of that our sustained attention, because we want to make sure that women are able to fulfil their potential in the workplace at any age. We have worked with businesses and academics to highlight the many practical actions that employers can take to support women going through menopause transition. That also sits alongside other policies and programmes, such as flexible working, which can help everyone remain economically active for as long as they choose to.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Pinnock and Lady Donaghy, and others, mentioned carers. We are committed to creating an economy that works for everyone, and it is great that the female employment rate is at a near record high. However, we know that unpaid care work, including childcare and informal care—for example, caring for sick relatives, friends or neighbours—is disproportionately performed by women, and taking time out of work or limiting work hours to care can have a big impact on pay and progression. We are therefore continuing to support families with their childcare costs, and are investing £6.6 million to support carers to remain in or return to work.

The noble Baroness, Lady Nye, also highlighted the difficulties experienced by young carers, and we need to keep them in consideration too. However, as I say, as the population ages, we will face a growing demand for care. We know that caring can be a rewarding experience but that it can also impact physical and mental health, well-being, relationships and employment. We must ensure that carers continue to have the freedom to provide care as they would wish, but to do so in a way that takes account of their own health and well-being, access to education, employment and life chances.

My noble friend Lady Chisholm and the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, spoke about the necessity of social care. Putting social care on a sustainable footing, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, is vital. The Prime Minister has made that a priority and has said that the Government will bring forward a plan for social care this year. We are commencing cross-party talks and are inviting MPs and Peers to voice their views. These are complex questions to address, which is why we are trying to build cross-party consensus. However, we have been clear: everybody will have safety and security, and nobody will be forced to sell their home to pay for care.

My noble friend Lady Chisholm also spoke of rural loneliness. The Government are working hard to tackle loneliness; nine government departments are working together on that, including Defra, which works specifically on rural issues. We are funding 126 projects that bring people together and looking at domestic abuse in rural areas. We recognise that victims may face increased isolation from support networks and lack of access to services, and the domestic abuse commission has agreed to undertake an in-depth exploration of current community-based support.

The noble Baroness, Lady Benjamin, spoke passionately of the damage that online harms and abuse can do to children and indeed others. We have



published our initial response to the online harms White Paper consultation, and the Queen's Speech included a commitment that the Government

"will develop legislation to improve internet safety for all."

We will continue to work hard on that to make sure that young people are not exposed to things that they should not be exposed to.

I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Shrewsbury and the noble Viscount, Lord Waverley, for highlighting primogeniture in this Chamber. As we know, the reform of the succession of hereditary peerage raises a variety of issues, including the legitimate expectation of males next in line to inherit titles and the effect on land and property rights. Any changes in this area will need to balance the desire to modernise the peerage with traditions that have been in place for centuries. Various approaches have been proposed in both Houses to address this but there has not been a consensus on the way forward. It is a complex issue that engages wider issues associated with the peerage. Further consideration is required and the Government continue to listen to the concerns of interested parties. I am grateful to my noble friend for his good suggestion of having a QSD to discuss the matter further and gauge the opinion of the House. We will look into making time for that.

My noble friend Lady Secombe spoke about single-sex spaces. We must ensure that women's rights, safety, freedom and dignity are recognised, defended and respected. That means maintaining safeguards to allow organisations to provide single-sex services for women and girls, while ensuring that adults who have decided that they are transgender are free to live their lives fully as they wish. She also spoke of a specific case. Although I cannot comment on ongoing cases, it is vital that every child gets the right care and support that they need if they are questioning their gender.

I have five minutes left to talk about international issues. I am sure that all noble Lords and Baronesses will agree that every woman and girl, whatever her background, should have the freedom, support and, where necessary, protection to achieve her full potential.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester highlighted the issue of domestic abuse across the world. We are a global leader in ending violence against women and girls in all its forms, including domestic violence, sexual violence, female genital mutilation, child, early and forced marriage, and sexual violence in conflict. In November, we announced the largest-ever investment by a single-donor Government to prevent violence against women and girls globally. This builds on DfID's brilliant What Works to Prevent Violence programme, which has done incredible investigation. We know that violence is preventable and we know how to prevent it; now it is about using that global good to scale up our investment and that of others too.

We will also use the opportunities of the Generation Equality Forum, led by UN Women, France and Mexico to celebrate Beijing+25—coronavirus permitting. As the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, and other noble Lords said, using Beijing as a hook to make further progress will be really important. I can also share that the UK has put itself forward to lead the action

coalition on gender-based violence, as this is an area where we think we can work with others to make a real difference.

We are defending and promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights. As the noble Viscount, Lord Waverley, highlighted, women and girls must have control over their bodies and access to services they need. Last year, we announced a new flagship programme that will provide more than 20 million women with access to family planning each year, preventing 5 million unintended pregnancies and saving 9,000 women's lives. We have a strong voice on sexual and reproductive health and rights; we put our money where our mouth is. I assure the noble Baroness, Lady Goudie, that we will continue to do that.

My noble friend Lady Anelay mentioned women's economic empowerment. I also met the Lionesses she referred to. I welcome her committee's work looking into what the Government are doing on Africa. We look forward to contributing to that. She also asked about Botswana. While she knows that DfID will work in aid-eligible countries, we also now have joint Ministers. All junior joint Ministers between FCO and DfID can make that link and ensure that, where we do not have a DfID presence, we are able to use our diplomatic network properly.

On women's peace and security, I loved the idea from my predecessor, my noble friend Lord Bates, about exclusively female scholarships to encourage leadership. We will take a look at that. I would also love to take on the commitment he has invited me to make on supporting women-only new heads of the UN and NATO, but I am not in a position to do so. However, I will commit to writing to my noble friend Lady Berridge on that, as he requested.

Many noble Lords and Baronesses talked about the importance of women's political empowerment overseas, with which I agree. On Afghanistan, we must make sure that women are involved in the peace process. I agree completely with my noble friend Lady Hodgson and the noble Baroness, Lady Goudie, that women have to be central to the peace process; it has to involve the local women who know what the issues are. Afghanistan is a priority country for women's meaningful participation. In the 20th anniversary year of UNSCR 1325, we continue to make clear to all sides that an Afghanistan political settlement must be reached through an inclusive process.

I am really running out of time. Climate change and COP are incredibly important, a subject that was spoken about by the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett. Through our presidency of COP, we will make sure that women and girls are at the centre of that; it of course was the focus of the march on Sunday. On the role of older women, I am afraid that I will have to write in detail to the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, who was quite right to highlight the important work done by them in NGOs. We have ways to ensure that we use those organisations on the ground to deliver the help needed. I join the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, in paying tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Loomba, for his incredible work on widows, and I will be pleased to hear about that in more detail. I am also grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, for highlighting that issue as well. She was also right to point out that

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it is not just older women who are widowed because younger women are too. We do a lot of work in that area and we know that widows are often the backbone of families and communities.

I am nearing the end of my allocated time, but I have saved the best until last because there is just enough time to end with an issue that is close to my heart. My job title now includes being the UK's special envoy on girls' education. This is a new role that really will accelerate progress on getting more girls in the world's poorest countries into school, thus benefiting them from quality learning. I join the noble Lord, Lord Young, in paying tribute to Malala, and we work closely with her foundation. We are committed to standing up for the rights of all girls to receive 12 years of quality education and we will not forget the girls in the IDP camps. It is not only the right thing to do, it is one of the smartest investments we can make. My noble friend Lord Ranger made the case for educating women very well in his maiden speech by explaining what it means to him personally. Educated women have vastly improved health prospects, as do their children, while educated women with access to contraception can choose if, when and how many children to have. They will also help to tackle the biggest challenge of our time: climate change.

I am now definitely out of time. I conclude by thanking everybody. It gave me pause for thought when I realised that the debate would be six hours

long, but I have genuinely enjoyed every minute of it because it has been a fantastic debate. I join noble Lords and Baronesses across the House in paying tribute to the many women both in the UK and overseas, from carers to domestic abuse campaigners, from civil rights activists to the women around the world who are fighting for their rights, as well as older women working in NGOs, as referred to by the noble Baroness, Lady Cox. We owe them all our gratitude. As we mark International Women's Day this year, it is right that we should celebrate with high fives or shots of whisky and look at how far we have come, but we know that there is more that we can do. Both at home and abroad we continue to champion equality of treatment and opportunity and I am proud that Britain has long been and will continue to be a world leader in this respect.

*Motion agreed.*

### **Joint Committee on Consolidation etc. Bills**

*Message from the Commons*

*A message was brought from the Commons that they have appointed a Select Committee of 11 Members to join with the Committee appointed by the Lords as the Joint Committee on Consolidation etc. Bills.*

*House adjourned at 8.37 pm.*



**Volume 802**  
**No. 37**

**Tuesday**  
**10 March 2020**

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**CONTENTS**

**Tuesday 10 March 2020**

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