

***Eaves, Unit 2.03 Canterbury Court, 1-3 Brixton Road, London, SW9 6DE***  
***End Violence Against Women Coalition, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London, EC2A 3EA***  
***Equality Now, 1 Birdcage Walk, London, SW1H 9JJ***  
***Object, PO Box 63639, London, SW9 1BQ***

The Right Honourable David Cameron MP  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

25<sup>th</sup> November 2012

Dear Prime Minister,

**Regarding the Leveson Inquiry, regulation of the press and British newspapers' portrayal of women**

We write urgently as Lord Justice Leveson will publish his long-awaited report into the culture, practices and ethics of the British press this Thursday 29 November and we wish to inform you of our organisations' further research and recommendations on the future regulation of the press. We enclose a new report we are publishing today, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November), which examines British national newspapers' portrayal of women and the harm and discrimination which ensue from this. We note that Lord Justice Leveson is reporting at a time when there is an ongoing public debate, prompted by the Jimmy Savile revelations, about sexual harassment and sexual abuse in our society. We enclose a copy of the most recent edition of The Daily Sport as an example of the most extreme ways in which women are sexualised and objectified, pornography and the sex industries are normalised, and violence against women is eroticised and trivialised within our national unrestricted press.

Our report's key findings are:

- Crimes of violence against women are frequently reported inaccurately and without context, with a tendency to minimise the perpetrator's actions and to blame the victim
- Some tabloids contribute to the sexualisation of girls while purporting to condemn it; sexual abuse of children is sometimes presented in a way that minimises the abuse and is even on occasion titillating
- In many newspapers women are persistently portrayed as sex objects, alongside the mainstreaming and 'normalising' of the sex industry; this is also an area where the line between advertising and editorial is extremely blurred
- Regarding women in public life, younger women are visible but heavily stereotyped and infantilised, while older, disabled and black and minority ethnic women are less visible, and those in public life are often subject to ridicule.

What we are asking for is a new press regulation regime which:

- Allows third parties to make complaints, and allows for thematic investigations as well as those on individual cases
- Has clear guidance about women's equality in the text of the new code; and has accountable representative(s) of the equality sector as member(s) of the new body
- Has compulsory membership for all newspapers
- Requires consistency between the broadcast watershed for sexually explicit material and newspapers

The End Violence Against Women Coalition is the UK's largest coalition of organisations working to eradicate violence against women and girls in the UK. Equality Now is an international human rights organisation working to promote and protect the rights of women and girls around the world. Object is an award-winning human rights organisation which campaigns against the sexual objectification of women in the media and popular culture. Eaves is a London-based charity that provides high quality housing and support to vulnerable women which also carries out research, advocacy and campaigning to prevent all forms of violence against women.

When you read our new enclosed report, 'Just the Women', which is a snapshot of coverage of women in the press taken over a two-week period in September 2012, we hope you will agree that it what we found is both prejudicial and harmful to women and girls. Our media is not just informed by, but in turn also informs, our broader culture and society. When articles and pictures condone or even blame women for abuse committed against them, we cannot be surprised, as stated by Alison Saunders, Chief Prosecutor for London earlier this year, that jurors' pre-conceived ideas about rape are hampering attempts to improve justice for survivors of sexual violence. When we are fed a daily diet of sexualised and objectified women in unrestricted newspapers available for sale to children, we cannot be surprised that this has an impact on a generation of boys and young men who are consuming increasingly extreme pornography at a younger and younger age. And when women in leadership positions are frequently mocked and objectified in the press, we cannot be surprised at the time it is taking for women to be represented in greater numbers at all levels of society.

These are issues of real concern to women and we know that these issues concern your government also. We welcome work to tackle violence against women and girls and to improve the justice system, as well as action to tackle the sexualisation of children including options to restrict children's access to online pornography. We note that action to tackle sexualisation in video games and music videos includes age-rating, and yet our daily newspapers that contain sexualised and pornographic images of women are sold in shops with no age-restriction whatsoever. Steps have also been taken by government to encourage more companies to appoint women on their boards. A comprehensive approach, however, is needed to join up the dots and ensure that all of this work informs and links with proposals for future regulation of the press following the Leveson Report. If our press culture remains one in which women are either invisible or semi-naked, stereotyped or vilified, our society and our democracy suffers.

We have seen excellent investigative and journalistic work by our press. We applaud its critical investigations and its holding government and society to account. We cherish this and would not see it harmed or curtailed. Our call is rather for a professional press that contributes to our democratic discourse, and this means accurate and fair reporting that does not discriminate against women.

Unfortunately this is not currently the case. Our report refers to examples of poor reporting over the two week period including:

*"Killer Stoke Ace gets life"* (Sun) focuses on the loss of a footballer's potential career rather than his extremely violent murder of his 15 year old girlfriend

*"Alex Reid won't face criminal damage charges over his late night arrest"* (Mirror) reports humorously on the cage fighter trying to break into his girlfriend's house

*"British business man accused of rape fails in anonymity bid"* (Telegraph), lengthy article about the public school education and successful business history of a man accused of rape

*"Soldier stabbed ex-girlfriend to death after he hacked her Facebook account and discovered she'd had an abortion"* (Daily Mail)

*"CAVORTING provocatively in a tiny pink swimsuit... little Ocean Orrey struts her stuff in a British beauty pageant – aged just FOUR"* (Sun) whilst apparently concerned for her welfare, this report on a toddler beauty pageant portrays a young child as acting in a sexy and knowing way

*"They bang 'em in Bangor...but there's no sex is Essex"* (Sport) is a report on a student sex survey, an example of the frequent focus in some newspapers on the sexual conduct of female students; the report uses the language of pornography ("horny young learners") and is accompanied by an image of a near naked young woman in a bar. This story was run alongside a separate story about a sexual violence conviction which was minimising of the offence ('Peeping Tom shower perv avoids prison') and alongside explicit sex industry adverts.

*"Pop babe is latest upskirt conquest of papararsey Pete"* (Sport) is an example of tabloid newspapers' frequent use of 'upskirt photography' whose captions and accompanying editorial present the images as exciting exactly because the subject is apparently not consenting to the photo being taken.

Reporting on the Cabinet re-shuffle during this period included editorial which was patronising, insulting and humiliating to women including Baroness Warsi and Maria Miller, including reference to women politicians' choice of dress.

We sent you copies of our written evidence to the Leveson Inquiry which we submitted in December last year, and wrote to you with our concerns earlier this year and were disappointed not to receive a reply. We would be happy to share more information with you now.

We hope that you will consider our report and the issues we raise carefully when you are considering options for a future regime for the press.

We will be making this letter public alongside your response.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

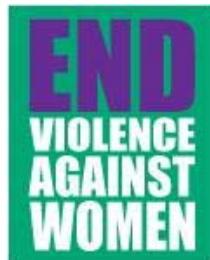
Heather Harvey

Research and  
Development Manager,  
Eaves



Holly Dustin

Director, End  
Violence Against  
Women



Jacqueline Hunt

Director, Equality Now



Anna van Heeswijk

CEO, Object



Cc Rt Hon Maria Miller, Culture Secretary  
Cc Rt Hon Nick Clegg, Deputy Prime Minister  
Cc Rt Hon Ed Miliband, Leader of the Opposition