

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP,
Secretary of State, DCMS,
100 Parliament Street,
London SW1A 2BQ

7th September 2020

Dear Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP,

Re: Using the Tech Tax to fund online abuse and harassment prevention

We are a coalition of 10 organisations calling for gender equality across all sectors of society and this includes combatting online violence against women and girls. You can make the UK a global leader in the fight against online abuse by calling on the Chancellor to commit 10% of the Digital Services Tax to tackling online abuse of women and girls.

In the social media age, online abuse is the new source of women's oppression, and women with intersecting identities are disproportionately targeted. Amnesty International found that one in five women in the UK have suffered online abuse or harassment, and Black women are 84% more likely than white women to be mentioned in abusive or problematic tweets.

The use of digital spaces has increased significantly in light of COVID-19, and with it has come reports of an increase in abuse and harassment online. Glitch and End Violence Against Women (EVAW) coalition's recent nation-wide survey showed that 41.5% of 480 respondents had faced online abuse since the beginning of the pandemic. This proportion increased to 50% for women of colour. Furthermore, stalking support services and police in the UK have reported a surge in cyberstalking during the first four weeks of the lockdown and there has been an increase in the posting of intimate and private images without consent.

In October 2018, the UK Chancellor announced a new Digital Services Tax of 2% on tech giants like Facebook, Google and Twitter expecting to generate £350 million. According to the Office for National Statistics, this 'tech tax' raised £29 million in the first month of operation alone. The 'polluter pays' principle, endorsed by the OECD for almost 50 years suggests that the companies enabling these harms to society should pay to help rectify the damage. By ring-fencing at least 10% of this new tax annually for ending online abuse against women and girls, the Government can commit at least £3.5 million to further establishing online standards which are fair and necessary to the growing digital economy.

To efficiently and effectively combat online abuse and violence against women and girls, we recommend this 10% should be pledged to civil society organisations to help fund their vital work to end online abuse, such as training on digital citizenship and online safety. These



organisations are currently facing greater demand at a time when their funding and existence are at risk. We also call on you to ensure that the UK's broader online harms and data protection agenda are protected in any trade agreements.

The UK's new online harms regime is unlikely to be running until the end of 2021 at the earliest. We need urgent action to end online abuse against women and girls and the digital services tax gives you the means to do that.

Now is the time for the Government to invest in ending online abuse and in a safer web for tomorrow.

Yours sincerely,

Seyi Akiwowo, Founder and Executive Director, Glitch

Helen Pankhurst, Convenor, Centenary Action Group

Sam Smethers, CEO Fawcett Society

Jennifer Nadel, Co-Founder, Compassion in Politics

Catherine Anderson, CEO, Jo Cox Foundation

Joeli Brearley, Founder, Pregnant Then Screwed

Dana Mills, Writer and Activist

Amelia Womack, Green Party Deputy Leader

Catherine Fookes, Direct of the Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales

Hannah Stevens, Director, The Parliament Project

Sally Patterson, Alliance of Jewish Women and their Organisations