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Ms Helena Dalli
European Commission
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13 March 2020

Dear Commissioner Dalli,

Following my letter of 10 December, I am writing to offer my congratulations on the publication of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25 on 5 March, and to extend an invitation to discuss how the Scottish Government and the EU can work together to realise gender equality for women and girls in Scotland, Europe and around the world.

It is a fitting year and an important one for women's rights around the world, 25 years after publication of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In Scotland, International Women's Day is an opportunity both to celebrate the progress that has been made towards gender equality, in Scotland and around the world, and to acknowledge that we have much progress still to make, for gender equality remains an unwon cause.

The Scottish Government is committed to gender equality. We believe that women and girls should have equal rights and opportunities, equal access to economic resources and decision making, and be able to live their lives free from all forms of violence, abuse and harassment.

We agree wholeheartedly that women's equality has a strong and positive impact on the economy and that we must do more to close the gender pay gap and support women's participation in the labour market. In fact, this year marks 50 years since the passage of the Equal Pay Act 1970 which made it unlawful in the UK for a woman to be paid less than a man for doing equal work or work of equal value.

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However, in some cases women are still fighting for their right to equal pay which is unacceptable. A gender pay gap between men and women also persists, though it remains a little lower than across the UK as a whole at 14.3% for all employees and just over 7% for full-time employees. Addressing the gender pay gap and the complex factors that together sustain women's disadvantage in the workplace is crucial to achieving our ambitions to deliver fair work in Scotland. As I noted in my previous letter, in March 2019 the Scottish Government published our [Gender Pay Gap Action Plan: A Fairer Scotland for Women](#) with over 60 actions to tackle the root causes of the gender pay gap. The action plan will address labour market inequalities faced by women, particularly disabled women, minority ethnic women, older women, women from poorer socio economic backgrounds and women with caring responsibilities. We will publish a progress report later this spring.

The EU Gender Equality Strategy clearly recognises that taking steps to ensuring caring responsibilities are shared more equally between women and men is crucial to realise our aims, and this is another area where the Scottish Government is taking action by transforming our childcare offer. We are also encouraging the UK Government to look at enhancing existing maternity and paternity rights, including introducing 12 weeks of 'use it or lose it' paternity leave for Dads.

I was pleased also to see the focus on women in leadership, particularly on corporate boards and in politics. In 2018, the Scottish Government introduced the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act which sets a gender representation objective for listed public authorities in Scotland that 50% of board members are women. Improving women's political representation in Scotland is an area where we are increasing our focus and looking at a broad range of strategies to encourage women's participation in politics and break down barriers.

We continue to take action to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls in line with our strategy '[Equally Safe](#)', including strengthening the law in certain areas and ensuring support for women, girls and children who are or who have experienced gender based violence. I was particularly pleased to secure additional funding for frontline services including Rape Crisis and Women's Aid Services in the most recent budget, increasing this to £13 million in 2020-21. Just last week, we also announced a £100,000 fund to address prostitution by challenging men's demand and supporting women via frontline services.

Currently, we are implementing the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 which creates a specific offence of domestic abuse that covers not just physical, but other forms of psychological abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour. Our Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in November 2019 and seeks to provide a clear statutory duty for Health Boards to provide forensic medical services for victims without first making a report to the police. Towards the end of this month, the Scottish Parliament will vote on legislation introduced by this Government to strengthen protections and improve support for women and girls at risk of Female Genital Mutilation.

There is much more I could detail, such as Scotland's world leading work on period dignity and the work of the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls. I am sure you will agree that the range of actions we are taking across government demonstrates strong synergies between our work in Scotland, and the priorities and actions set forth in the EU Gender Equality Strategy.

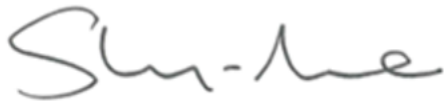
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While we profoundly regret the UK's decision to leave the EU, it is the Scottish Government commitment to remain a proactive and positive partner of the EU whatever the outcome of the UK/EU negotiations on the future relationship. This commitment is clearly set out in our recently published EU strategy [The European Union's Strategic Agenda for 2020-24: Scotland's Perspective](#) detailing the values Scotland and the EU share for the promotion of peace, democracy, human rights and equality of all our citizens.

It is against this background that I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss further. I am joined in this letter by my colleague Christina McKelvie, Minister for Older People and Equalities, and Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills.

Yours sincerely,



SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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