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This is a seismic moment to tackle violence and sexual harassment around the world

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I have spent years campaigning on social justice issues concerning the rights of women and girls. I feel driven by the conviction that it is essential to try, with the hope that with collective effort, things can be improved – while motivated by a combination of outrage and empathy .

But rarely does a moment occur when, as an activist, I sense that seismic change might be in the air. This week will be one of those moments. I'm writing to say that we must seize it.

In the coming days we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to call time on one of the most shameful blights on women's lives: violence and sexual harassment in the world of work.

Governments, employees and workers at the International Labour Conference in Geneva are negotiating the final text of a global convention to put an end to this all too common form of abuse.

Imagine: a global law that will protect all workers, everywhere, from being exploited and sexually harassed at work. It is a shameful reality that this is both necessary and long overdue.

As I write, one in three countries have no laws against sexual harassment in the workplace. That means 235 million women around the world have no legal protection from being exploited, tormented and abused as they try to earn a living.

As ever, it is the poorest women who need protection the most. The ones who are most vulnerable to abuse, yet are left without recourse when it takes place.

· Women who work for low pay, or even no pay at all.

· Domestic workers across Latin America, toiling for little more than food and a bed.

- Factory workers in South East Asia who often live hand-to-mouth.

- Home-based workers who don't appear in social audits or workplace policies.

Millions of women around the world work in the informal sector, without contracts, without rights, without protection. These are women whose bodies can be easy targets, and whose silence is all too easy to enforce.

This convention will make the greatest difference to them. It is a global convention for women everywhere. If the #MeToo movement has taught us anything, it's that no woman is immune to the threat of sexual harassment in the course of her work.

Misogynistic attitudes and behaviour pervade every walk of life, at every level of society, in every country. Sexism is universal. This is one of the reasons I emphasise the importance of "global feminism".

The magnitude of the abuse and suffering of women worldwide is shocking and overwhelming. We must challenge the ignorance and indifference that cause such misery for millions of women, especially those with no voice or platform. It is essential that we speak out and take action. And that is what we are asking of the UK government this week.

The fact that we have reached this point gives me hope. This kind of progress doesn't happen by itself. Change is the result of so much collective work from countless individuals and organisations working tirelessly, in solidarity and across borders: global feminism in action.

For the past two years on International Women's Day many thousands of people around the world have gathered in solidarity at Care International's #March4Women, to demand this global convention, and I have been among them.

I want to acknowledge the energy and effort among grassroots campaigners who have taken us this far, as well as the politicians who listened and acted to ensure that ending violence and sexual harassment is on the agenda at this conference.

With real change within reach, it is down to the UK government to show bold leadership, and use every ounce of its influence to ensure that a convention is agreed and — crucially — that it is strong and inclusive of all kinds of workers, wherever they work.

Last week Theresa May spoke at the conference about the need for governments everywhere to take strong action to end modern slavery.

The UK has played a vital role in bringing this issue into the spotlight and galvanising action. It's time for the government to show that same leadership in the global effort to end violence and harassment at work.

For years we have heard the stories of women who have been subjected to humiliating misogyny, traumatic harassment and violence at work. And for years even more women have remained silent.

It is hard to hear these stories, and harder still to share them. But imagine carrying on into the future, in the knowledge that we had a "once in a generation" opportunity to provide legal protection for women everywhere around the world, and that it was squandered.

It would be unthinkable to have come this far and end up empty-handed.

Annie Lennox is a singer, campaigner and founder of The Circle NGO
