

Every Day is Women's Day

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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Each party can claim political firsts. Sinn Fein had the first woman elected: Constance Markievicz declined to take her seat. Labour provided the first woman Speaker and Foreign Secretary; the first two women Prime Ministers have been Conservatives. Viscountess Nancy Astor, a Conservative, was the first woman to take a seat in parliament. The Liberal Democrats have nine female MPs, balancing four males.

There are 225 female MPs in the UK parliament — a figure falling well short of gender parity but a great improvement since 1984 when there were 23 before my wife was first elected. One hundred years ago, Ellen Chapman had served for two years as Mayor of Worthing. She had also been elected to West Sussex County Council.

This week I am seeing a prospective future parliamentary candidate. Over the months Virginia and I have been listening to her steps towards standing to serve in the House of Commons. On Tuesday, newspapers including The Times have given the history of women's participation.

This year's message has been to #BreakTheBias.

Representation in Parliament is only one part of progress. We want to see parity across all spheres in jobs at every level: race, gender, sexuality and so on. Pay gaps have lasted too long. Pay transparency in the job application process should challenge disparity when factoring in race or gender or irrelevant disabilities.

Collective action and shared action on parity is what gives International Women's Day impact. These are the words of the International Women's Day organising team. We should not fear challenging what some consider normal and what many more consider harmful.

People need to feel safe at work, they need to feel equally valued and fully respected. That is what makes important the Independent Expert Report on behaviours by the former Speaker to his Secretaries, female and male, and to the former Clerk.

Professor Amartya Sen, like his friend my economics supervisor Sir James Mirrlees, was awarded the Nobel prize. I claim it was for saying with confidence that when the harvests fail, people do not die of starvation in a democracy.

Where political leaders serve with the consent of the people, they try to avoid the disastrous consequences of war or pestilence. Given power, influence and the vote, women as people, as parents and as spouses or partners more than double the shared desire for peace, justice and the ways that lead to stability, prosperity and better lives for all.

If voting were allowed to make a difference in Russia, women and men would not have chosen a continuation of rule by President Putin. We should not be witnessing the continuing attack on the free people of Ukraine where a democracy is being destroyed.

We support the women and men defending their nation; may we help further those who have been able to escape the conflict for the safety of themselves, their families and their loved ones; let us not ignore the horrors imposed on the people of Ukraine at the whim of the dictator.

Last week, I wrote to the Prime Minister with concern that we must help those fleeing the country out of fear for their lives and to escape from the Russian invaders' deadly force. Ukrainians wish to defend the freedom and sovereignty of their country. It is an issue of protecting lives and enabling safe havens for those able to escape the conflict.

Were there free elections in Russia, as we have had in Ukraine, we would not see war return to the European continent. Perhaps we would see a female President of the Russian Federation.