

# Gender equality advocates join unions to condemn Morrison Government's response to sexual harassment

Following the March4Justice actions last month, and the failure of the Federal Government to properly respond to the Respect@Work report last week, a diverse group of organisations representing women's rights have today launched a 4 point demand that will deliver real safety at work for women.

The Safe Work 4 Women statement outlines key changes to legislation aimed at eliminating sexual violence and harassment at work. In its response to Respect@Work, the Federal Government has failed to provide proper protections for women at work, with no new rights for people experiencing sexual violence and harassment and no further responsibility on employers to ensure a safe workplace and prevent sexual violence and harassment.

The group identifies the upcoming meeting of Commonwealth, State and Territory Work health and safety Ministers in May as a test of whether the Government will vote to support change so employers are obliged to prevent sexual harassment.

The statement is supported by the ACTU, the Parenthood, the Shift to Gender Equality, 50/50 by 2030, Gen Vic, Per Capita and Professor Sara Charlesworth from RMIT University.

## Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"The ACTU is joining with women's organisations to make four clear demands for what the Federal Government should be doing to immediately to make workplaces safer.

"The failure of the Federal Government to properly respond to the Respect@Work report is devastating for so many women who thought the last few months would have led to real change.

"In particular, the Morrison Government failed to take up recommendations to make the changes to health and safety laws, the Fair Work Act and the Sex Discrimination Act to provide real protections against sexual harassment and ensure employers had a responsibility to provide a safe workplace.

"The Government response to sexual harassment leaves all the onus on the shoulders of women to make complaints and none on employers to prevent harassment

## Quotes attributable to Georgia Dent, Executive Director, The Parenthood:

"Sexual harassment and assault in workplaces is a systemic and prolific problem that requires systemic solutions to eliminate, as the Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner's Respect@Work report so thoroughly illustrates.

"For too long individual women have borne the burden of managing sexual harassment and assault in their places of work. It is too often that victims of harassment and assault lose their jobs and their income and their standing - rather than perpetrators. It is absolutely critical and overdue that employers assume active responsibility not just for managing sexual harassment after it occurs but eliminating it. Providing a complaints mechanism is not good enough.

"The Federal government's commitment to making all workplaces safer for women will be judged on whether it commits to four substantive changes in the Respect@Work report that will strengthen health and safety laws and lead to meaningful reform.

"The Parenthood advocates for positive policy changes for parents and families. All parents deserve access to safe workplaces but as it stands too many women - mothers included - are being denied this basic right and they are coming together to say enough is enough."

**Quotes attributable to Prof Sara Charlesworth, RMIT University:**

“Despite evidence that sexual harassment is more frequent in certain workplace settings and in particular industries, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner cannot currently decide to conduct inquiries into those industries or workplaces. The Sex Discrimination Commissioner need to be empowered with a broad inquiry function, which is adequately resourced, to ensure that barriers to addressing and eliminating sexual harassment are removed.”

**Quotes attributable to Tanja Kovac, CEO, GEN VIC:**

"Women across the nation were hard hit by the economic and social impacts of COVID19 pandemic. They have carried the burden of job losses, the risk of infection in essential caring workforces and educating children at home. At a time when women have given so much to the nation, it is completely understandable why they are expecting much more from governments than unimplemented recommendations and zero funding for the issues that matter to their daily lives.

“Delivering laws, policies and funding that keeps women safe at work is the bare minimum of what women are expecting from government right now. The March4Justice had many demands and there is much to do if we want to deliver a gender equal recovery from COVID19.”

**Quotes attributable to Renee Carr, Executive Director, Fair Agenda:**

“There are massive gaps in the Federal Government’s response to the Respect@Work report. We all deserve a safe workplace – whether we’re working in the halls of Parliament, cleaning an office, or waiting tables. That won’t happen unless the government meaningfully implements all of the changes recommended - including requiring employers to provide safer workplaces, and providing justice for those affected.

“This moment of reckoning demands concrete commitments to a safer future for all - in our workplaces and across our communities. We need the federal government to make meaningful, systemic change to address men’s gender-based violence everywhere – and that must include: improved prevention, proper resourcing of services and accountability mechanism, law reform and action to address workplace sexual harassment. Anything else is a decision to leave women in danger and to deny survivors justice.”

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