

## **UK NATIONAL STATEMENT FOR WORKING SESSION 5**

### **Ensuring equal enjoyment of rights and equal participation in political and public life**

Mr Moderator,

The UK fully aligns with the statement made this morning by Spain on behalf of the EU and its Member States, but we would like to add some additional comments in our national capacity.

The United Kingdom has taken considerable steps over many years to ensure equal participation in political and public life. We know that more remains to be done, but we are proud of the transformation over, for example, the past 50 to 100 years to make our political leadership increasingly representative of the people of the UK.

In 1918, the UK passed an act that allowed women the vote for the first time, ten years later, in 1928, women got the vote on the same terms as men. In 1919, the first woman took her seat as an MP in the House of Commons. Now, almost 100 years later, a record number, 208 of the 650 Members of Parliament, are women.

The current UK Parliament is the most diverse ever. In addition to being 32 percent female, there are 52 MPs from minority ethnic backgrounds, 45 MPs who openly identify as LGBT, and a number of MPs with physical disabilities.

The 40% increase of LGBT MPs is a significant step, coming as it does 50 years after the passage of the Sexual Offences Act in England and Wales, which marked an important step towards legal equality for LGBT people in the UK.

This anniversary, and the diverse nature of the current parliament, gives us the chance to remember the work of those who campaigned so long to deliver the change we see now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not just on LGBT issues, but also those who have campaigned for a voice for representatives of minority ethnic groups, disabled persons, and, hardly a minority, women. Today we call them human rights defenders.

Many braved abuse, ridicule, even imprisonment in their quest for justice and human rights. They fought for what was right with courage and determination; and helped make the UK a better place.

Many individuals across the OSCE region still work to combat discrimination and hate crime based gender, race, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, amongst other things, in line with OSCE commitments to combat all forms of discrimination. They deserve our admiration and our support. Everyone should be free to enjoy their lives free from harassment and discrimination, happy and proud of who they are.