The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

10 Downing Street

London

SW1A 2AA

27th April 2023

Dear Prime Minister,

We are a group of survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) online writing to call for the inclusion of a mandatory VAWG Code of Practice in the Online Safety Bill.

As survivors of violence against women and girls online, our experiences include online grooming, child sexual abuse and exploitation; intimate image abuse, blackmail, and the receipt of unsolicited intimate images from men; and misogynistic abuse and threats of physical violence, including rape. VAWG online is a pervasive and growing threat that impacts too many women and girls across the UK.

Whilst our experiences are different, we have all been ignored and overlooked by technology companies who have not taken violence experienced by women and girls online seriously enough.

Technology companies have failed to recognise the risks posed by their platforms, designed systems exposing us to significant harm, and made it unsafe for us to report our abuse. They have never seen our perspective or experiences as something to learn from, listen to, and act on, but instead operate independently of the women and girls who face violence on their platforms.

We are fighting for an online world which is safer for women and girls now and in the future. Tackling the abuse and harm women and girls experience online must be a top priority if we are going to stop the abuse and harm that we have experienced from happening to others.

That is why we support the introduction of a mandatory VAWG Code of Practice in the Online Safety Bill.

A Code of Practice will guide online services in how to tackle VAWG online, ensuring the prevention of harm is built into platforms. If companies are not required to do this, the specific risks women and girls face will continue to go unaddressed. We must be able to assess the steps companies are taking and hold them accountable for implementing meaningful changes that offer their users better protection.

We urge you to take this opportunity to show girls and women that they can be themselves online – and that they deserve to do this free from violence and online abuse.

Yours sincerely,

Elaine\* - Elaine\* is an online safety campaigner. She was groomed online and sexually abused when she was 13 by a 31-year-old man.

Frida\* - Frida\* is an online safety campaigner. She was groomed online and exploited for sexually explicit images by a man in his 30s.

Roxy – Roxy is an online safety campaigner. She was 13 when she was pressured into sending photographs to a boy four years older than her which were then shared and used to blackmail her.

Sharon Gaffka – Sharon is a Refuge ambassador and host of Girls Know Nothing podcast. Sharon has experienced online misogynistic abuse, sexual harassment, and threats of rape.

Charlie Webster – Charlie is a broadcaster, podcaster and campaigner, as well as an NSPCC Ambassador for Childhood.

Danielle Armitage – Danielle is an online safety campaigner and survivor of online grooming and sexual abuse.

Mared Parry – Mared is a journalist, TV presenter and campaigner who was groomed online when she was 14.

Natasha Devon – Natasha is a Glitch ambassador and a writer, presenter & activist. As a public figure, Natasha experiences online misogynistic abuse.

*\*Names changed to protect identity.*