



**Response to the Home Office/Scottish Executive  
*Consultation: On the possession of extreme pornographic  
material* from the Scottish Women's Convention – November  
2005**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 'possession of extreme pornographic material' consultation paper. The Scottish Women's Convention welcomes any efforts towards making illegal the possession of pornographic material.

The Convention provides a systematic way for women's organisations to come together to discuss specific issues that are of interest, or concern, to women. Its purpose is to positively influence the development of policy, and so improve the lives of women in Scotland.

It is with this in mind that we offer the following comments and answers to the questions posed in the consultation paper.

**Current Legislation Q. Do you think that the challenge posed by the Internet in this area requires the law to be strengthened?**

Yes

**Evidence of Harm Q. In the absence of conclusive research results as to its possible negative effects, do you think that there is some pornographic material which is so degrading, violent or aberrant that it should not be tolerated?**

The Scottish Women's Convention views ALL pornography as violence against women because it is a systematic practice of exploitation and subordination based on sex, which differentially harms women.

It is also central in creating and maintaining sex as a basis for discrimination. The bigotry and contempt it produces with the acts of aggression it justifies, harms women's opportunities for equality and rights of all kinds (Scottish Women against Pornography 2004).

In terms of 'evidence of harm' there is as noted in the consultation document "a substantial body of research which explores the effects of pornography on attitudes, beliefs and behaviour". Pornography is routinely used in the abuse of children, often as part of the 'grooming' process. The Scottish Women's Convention is concerned that we are not protecting children if we do not properly address the issue of pornography. Ray Wyre, the Director of the Gracewell Clinic which treats sex offenders in the UK, has identified a cycle of sexual abuse and how pornography is implicated at every stage: in predisposing men to abuse, in legitimating abuse, in reducing internal and external inhibitions to abuse, and in initiating and carrying out abuse. (Wyre, 1991). He asserts that 'pornography is incredibly powerful in creating and maintaining distorted thinking, the rape myths and the child abuse myths that exist in society. From pornography sex offenders get rape myths: women mean yes when they say no; women ask for it; women like force-pornography reinforces those myths, they only have to look at pornography to acquire those myths.'

**Content of Material Q. Do you agree with the list of material set out in paragraph 39?**

The Scottish Women's Convention does not agree with the definition of 'extreme' because it does not see how a line can be drawn in terms of the harm inflicted to those involved in making the material or indeed the impact on the viewer. What is objectionable about pornography is its abusive and degrading portrayal of females and female sexuality and not simply its sexual content or explicitness.

Pornography whether defined as 'mainstream' or as 'extreme' equally involves the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words, which also includes one or more of the following:

- Women are presented dehumanised as sexual objects, things, or commodities
- Women are presented as sexual objects enjoying pain or humiliation or rape
- Women are presented as sexual objects tied up, cut up, mutilated, bruised or physically hurt
- Women are presented in postures of sexual submission or servility or display
- Women are presented reduced to body parts, penetrated by objects or animals

Women are presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes those conditions sexual. How can any depiction of rape not be 'extreme'?

**Content of Material Q. Do you believe there is any justification for being in possession of such material?**

No

**Options Q. Which option do you prefer?**

Option three

**Options Q. Why do you think this option is best?**

The Scottish Women's Convention believes that option three would be the best choice because a clear message must be sent that accessing this material is unacceptable and is certainly not harmless.

We would wish to preserve the flexibility of the OPA and CG(S) A to deal with the publication of obscene material and to develop a new free-standing offence for possession of obscene material.

**Penalties Q. Which penalty option do you think is preferable?**

To impose a penalty for possession of three years and increase the penalty for OPA offences and offences under section 51 of the CG(S) A, to maintain the distinction, to 5 years.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Scottish Women's Convention Steering Group Member Organisations**

- Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre
- The Association of Scottish Businesswomen
- British Federation of Women Graduates (Scottish Associations)
- Church of Scotland Guild
- Engender
- Fairplay Scotland
- Glasgow Women and Social Inclusion Working Group
- Glasgow Women's Library
- Granite Sisters
- One Parent Families Scotland
- Rape Crisis Scotland
- Scottish Women's Aid
- Scottish Women's Budget Group
- Scottish Women's Rural Institutes
- Soroptimist International
- STUC Women's Committee
- YWCA Scotland