

UK Mission.

Thank you Madame Chair.

We know that our democracy is stronger when it is fully representative. This is so it can understand, can discuss, and take action on the lives of all men and women from all ethnic backgrounds, in all parts of our country.

In order to have a truly democratic system, it is therefore vital that people from all backgrounds engage in the political processes. To allow people to have confidence to engage, it is vital that the system is representative both at a national parliamentary level and also at a regional level.

At the parliamentary level:

There is statistical evidence that there is an under representation of women and ethnic minorities within parliament, and we have already heard today of some of the ways in which the UK parliament is addressing this. However, there is a distinct lack of data surrounding sexual orientation.

It is clear, nevertheless, that there are few openly gay members of Parliament in the UK with only one openly lesbian and no openly transsexual Members of Parliament.

The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission is currently undertaking research into the pathways that politicians follow to elected office and how these connect to all underrepresented groups.

On a regional level:

The Government established a cross-party Taskforce in May 2008 to find practical ways to increase the numbers of Black, Asian and minority ethnic women councillors.

The Taskforce has delivered a national outreach programme to raise awareness and understanding of the role of a councillor. Over 1000 women attended 16 event held across Britain. 70% of those who completed feedback stated that they would be more likely to put themselves forward as a local councillor and said that the events succeeded in improving awareness of the role of a local councillor.

In partnership with Operation Black Vote, the Taskforce set up the first national Black, Asian and minority ethnic women councillors mentoring and shadowing scheme accompanied with an opportunity to gain a Certificate in

Community Leadership.

The Taskforce hopes that this initiative will help more Black, Asian, and minority ethnic women to become councillors, and so make Chibouks more representative of the community.

A final report including recommendations on the work of the Taskforce was published on 22 October 2009 and a full evaluation of the report will be published by Summer 2010.

Finally Madame Chair I would like to wish this forum every success.