

Women Scared to Leave Islam Find Safe Haven

An initiative to help protect people—especially women—in the United Kingdom who want to leave Islam but fear the consequences of doing so has been launched by Christian Concern.

Entitled “Safe Haven,” the project is a response to the brutal treatment experienced by some in the U.K. who have left Islam to become Christians. It offers confidential advice and support to those considering leaving Islam and may even help individuals to relocate.

An advertising campaign has been launched to highlight the availability of help.

The launch on Wednesday took place at Church House in Westminster and was attended by members of the Church of England’s General Synod and representatives of other organizations.

‘My own family would rather see me dead’

One of those who spoke at the event, Fiaz, explains: “My own household, my brothers, my parents, they don’t want anything to do with me. They’d rather see me dead.”

His own experience has moved him to highlight the problems that others in the U.K.—especially women—face if they want to leave Islam.

“When an Asian girl turns away from the culture or the religion itself then it’s all about honor. They are at greater risk than the men are,” he warns. “There are hundreds and hundreds of women across the country who have turned away from

Islam. And there are those who are still at home, but they are too afraid to turn away because they don't feel that they have anywhere to go.

"Right now ... there are girls who are beaten, who are abused, and they are afraid to go out and tell others because they feel that if they did and they got caught, that's the end of the road. I came across a girl a year ago whose own brother raped her. She is still at home. If she had an escape route, she would take it."

Watch a short video interview with Fiaz here (3 mins).

'Why do we have to live in fear of our lives?'

Another supporter of the project explains how, as a 10-year-old she thought about leaving home but "felt that I couldn't dishonor the family and leave, so I ended up being quite suicidal and didn't talk to anybody and spent all my time on my own."

Now she asks, "It's OK for people when they convert from another religion to Islam. Nobody says: 'I'm going to kill you.' They don't live in fear of their lives. Why is it that when a person leaves an Islamic background, becomes a Christian, why do we have to live in fear of our lives?"

Watch a short video interview with Selena here (3 1/2 mins).

'I only just escaped with my life and my sanity intact'

Another woman tells of how, at age 12, she was sent to Bangladesh to enter a forced marriage. When that failed, another attempt was made when she was 16. She recalls: "The memory still makes me feel physically sick. If I shut my eyes I can almost smell him and see him sitting opposite me, licking his lips with delight. Incredibly, in the eyes of the

Muslim community, this appalling union was going to bring honor to my family. I only just escaped with my life and my sanity intact.”

‘Stop being a crusader and move’

Another speaker at the launch event, Nissar, left Islam whilst living in the U.K. but has received death threats, experienced recurring verbal abuse, and had his car burned and house vandalized. When he first went to the police, he was told to “stop being a crusader and move.”

Watch a short video interview with Nissar here (3 mins).

‘Need a safe place to stay?’

An advertising campaign has been launched to coincide with the launch.

Under the headlines, “At Risk,” “Threatened,” “Afraid” and “Fearful,” the ads read:

“If you’ve converted to Christianity and feel like you need to watch your back, Safe Haven can give you a safe place to stay.”

‘People need to wake up’

Fiaz welcomed the launch of Safe Haven saying, “if outsiders think that this is not happening in Britain, then they need to wake up, because it is.”

“An individual who has turned away from Islam will get killed. It hasn’t happened yet, but it will happen. The Safe Haven project is long overdue. It’s time to act now,” he warns.

‘Love drives us’

Co-founder of Christian Concern and member of the Safe Haven team, Pastor Ade Omooba, also spoke at the launch event.

Ade welcomed the project, saying: “The compassion of Jesus Christ drives us. Love demands that we do not turn a blind eye but stand with those who want to leave Islam. We want to see people set free from fear.

“At Christian Concern, we have heard of these appalling experiences too often. Something needs to be done.”

Andrea Williams, chief executive, adds: “We are very grateful to all those who have given money and offered practical help to enable us to get this far. Please continue to pray for and support this vital initiative.”