

File name: UKLSE_CT1_SD01_001_001_0008_0001.wav

Audio quality: Great

Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: Unable to decipher = (ia + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** = (ph + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode).

Moderator: It's Monday 20th January 2020 and I'm with Ranjit Kaur. Ranjit was Director of Rights of Women from 2000 to the end of 2007. Rights of Women increases women's access to justice through the provision of legal advice and information. As director, Ranjit ensured that women's rights were seen as a human rights issue. Ranjit is sharing her experience of working in the women's voluntary community sector and campaigning for women's rights for the sisters doing for themselves archive. Ranjit, if you can begin by telling us what influenced your decision to work in the sector and for women's rights.

Ranjit Kaur: Well, firstly, hello. I was mainly influenced through my career choices up until that point. Previous to joining Rights of Women, I was the UNISON women's officer for the south-east region, so I had an interest, I'd worked there for eight years or so. I had an interest in women's rights issue and when the opportunity arose to work at Rights of Women, I looked at it as the perfect time to move from a trade union career, bringing my skills, the experiences I had, and use them at Rights of Women. I'd also done a law degree, during my time at UNISON, and I thought a combination of those skills, my trade union background, my time as an activist, I was also active in another charity as a trustee for a period of time, and then, moving into Rights of Women with my law degree and my legal background. A combination of all those factors, it just seemed the right choice for me at the right time. Prior to working at UNISON, I was a civil servant for fourteen years and I was very active in the trade union movement there, particularly on equal rights issues. I was chair of their national black members committee and I was always active on their national women's committee. So, it's a combination of all those factors brought me to Rights of Women when this opportunity arose.

Moderator: You talked about being an activist prior to working for Rights of Women. Can you talk a bit about your activism?

Ranjit Kaur: Yes, as I say, I was active in the trade union movement, primarily, and active on a number of fronts. I worked on issues at that time such as equal pay, domestic violence, sexual harassment was a big issue for trade unions. Certainly, as far as black women are concerned, being the chair of the black members committee, the double discrimination that black women face, the racism that black women face. So, a number of issues, racism, obviously, within women's structures was a key concern of mine and something that was a particular issue that I wanted to highlight and work upon. So, active on a number of fronts. Certainly, my union activity was also invoicing me in things like, I started off as a local negotiator. So, I was negotiating on things like pay, things like terms of employment, new

technology at that time was being brought in, redundancy. So, I had a wide variety of different areas that I was involved in, and basically, all these have stood me in good stead. I was also a manager for a period of time, in the civil service. So, my managerial background also played a part. So, I was sometimes the person arguing for better terms for somebody, for a group of people, or across the civil service, or within the trade union movement, but on the other side, I was also the manager dealing with issue. So, I had that perspective as well.

Moderator: The first refuge that was set up in 1972.

Ranjit Kaur: Chiswick.

Moderator: Yes, in Chiswick, did that give any influence on your decision to work in the women's sector?

Ranjit Kaur: Well, in 1971, I was a child. I was aware later on about the establishment of the work that Erin Pizzey did at Chiswick. So, it was an awareness I had, but I don't think that influenced my decision to get involved. It was more my own experiences as well. I lived in India for five years as a child, between the ages of eleven and sixteen, and I do not think there was a single day of my journey to school and home that I wasn't sexually harassed. I can honestly say that and it's basically, what I found quite worrying, even as a child, was the acceptability of that behaviour, and the link to Bollywood films, where Bollywood is such a big thing in India. There was this behaviour onscreen where Bollywood heroes are sexually harassing women who then fall in love with them and it's all romance and, you know, songs and dances, and that's all seen as right, that's fine, this is life, but to actually then act it out, for these men and boys to act it out on a daily basis was quite terrifying for me and my sisters on our journey to school every day.

So, for me, sexual harassment was quite a big issue, and then, seeing around me the way that women were treated, and my mother's experiences. My parents came to this country in the 50s and my mother, she was one of the first people in her family, in fact, they were the only part of their family that emigrated in the 50s, and her experiences, I saw, you know, I became an interpreter for my mother on many occasions. I saw the way she was dealt with as a woman, as an Asian woman, and I saw the way that people treated her, the nurses, the doctors, you know, whenever she would have to go into the doctors or school even to talk to the teachers, and I was the interpreter, and then generally, through her working life, I saw the way she was treated and the way she dealt with that. My mother's a very strong individual, a very strong woman, and for me, you know, it was an experience, but also, it's obviously impacted on me and I saw things there that I wanted changed.

Moderator: So, really, your roots lay in your childhood experiences in India?

Ranjit Kaur: Yes.

Moderator: Your beginnings?

Ranjit Kaur: And before that, you know, I grew up in the Midlands. I was born in the Midlands, I grew up in the Midlands, until we went to India, when I was eleven years old, we went, and up until then, I experienced racism more than sexism. You know, in those days,

terms like 'wogs' were the common. I remember as a child playing in the street and a man telling me to go back to my country as I played in the street, and I couldn't have been more than six years old. So, my experiences prior to going to India were more of racism. What happened in India was the racism was then displaced by sexism, and when I came back from India, I had a taste of both, when I came back in 1976, which was ironic, because it was the time when the Race Relations Act just got past and the Sex Discrimination Act had been passed the previous year, but I have to say, I did not see the benefits of either of those pieces of legislation for many, many years.

Moderator: Thank you. Moving on to leadership. Who inspired you and who inspires you now?

Ranjit Kaur: Gosh. So many women have inspired me. I think key amongst them would be my mother. Mother's a great inspiration to me, her experiences. Jayaben Desai of the Grunwick Workers. All those women, in fact, at Grunwick. I remember watching that dispute and for the first time, seeing Asian women on TV and being (TC 00.10.00) interviewed and leading a strike. Then Sophia Duleep Singh, Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, the Suffragette who became a very influential Suffragette, but she's been lost in history. I mean, it was a few years ago, I just came across her story, and I was shocked when I discovered how much she had done and how much she'd been written out of history. She was one of the leading Suffragettes at the time, and she was facing prison. She was a princess, she was the daughter of the last king of the Punjab, and a book has been written by her now, thankfully, her story has been told. Anita Anand has written a book, that's about Sophia Duleep Singh, and I would encourage everybody to read it, it's a tremendous story about a black woman in the Suffragette movement. So, she's an inspiration to me. Sorry, was there a second part to that question?

Moderator: Well, there was, but if we could go back, could you describe how these different women have inspired you? You've, kind of, talked about Princess-,

Ranjit Kaur: Sophia Duleep Singh, yes. My mother, obvious reasons, and then, Jayaben Desai and the Grunwick Dispute. Another one's Judy McKnight who was an assistant general secretary at the NUCPS, the National Union of Civil and Public Servants, and she was the most senior woman officer when I was involved in the trade union movement as a lay official. She was a massive influence on me, in that she was the most senior woman I could think of in a trade union at that time, and she gave her time to me. She encouraged me, she mentored me, she pointed out, she would often spend the time discussing things with me. She would point out jobs in the sector for me. She was a massive influence for me and I'll be ever grateful to her for that leadership she demonstrated, not just to me, to hundreds, I imagine, of women at that time. Then, people like Angela Davis was a big inspiration to me, especially when I was younger, I used to read a lot about Angela Davies and the civil rights movement. All the black women, in fact, in the civil rights movement in America. June Jordan, Angela Davies, Alice Walker, these were all great inspiration, their stories, their ways of operating, inclusion.

So, yes, I'd also include Helena Kennedy as an inspiration to me. When I first started studying law, I was given her book, 'Eve Was Framed,' to read, and I read it, and I actually

invited her to come and speak at a women's meeting in my union, in UNISON, she came on a Saturday morning. She gave up her Saturday morning and it was just one of those moments where you meet somebody you really admire and you get the chance to talk to them and, you know, they are no different than you would imagine. Which is even better when you discover the person is, you know, even nicer than you imagined, in giving her time, and that, I think, is quite inspirational, and an indication of her leadership, when you're not different personas and you can give your time. Happy to talk to people and happy to talk to other women and discuss, answer questions, you know, it's great.

Moderator: Who inspires you now?

Ranjit Kaur: Wow. I find the older I get, I'm still inspired by the people who inspired me when I was younger. I do get inspired by a lot of stories I read about, say, like, the women in Saudi Arabia who are in prison because they decided to drive when they weren't supposed to. I don't know their names, all of them, so many of them. Like, the women in Iran who get 100 lashes because they're lawyers who represent women and, you know, they face years in jail. I mean, these women are inspirational. I mean, I'm not sure I would have the courage to do that and when I see women doing that, you know, the woman who, in Pakistan, gets stoned to death because she won't submit to some old tradition that they have in some place where village law rules. I mean, these women, I admit, I don't know their names, but I'm still inspired by those women who stand up and are prepared to fight in that way. I'm also inspired by a couple of politicians actually. Nicola Sturgeon, I do admire Nicola Sturgeon. I admire the way she is showing leadership, the way she responds to issues, the way she's united the people in her party, I think that's, you know, that's very-, and Jacinda Ardern, the New Zealand Prime Minister, I find her very impressive. I think she's a mentor to-, I'm sure she's a role model, sorry, not a mentor, a role model to many women and girls, and I hear that, I hear her name in common usage amongst women and girls as somebody to look up to and showing a style of leadership that, you know, I think is quite progressive.

Moderator: How do you approach leadership? What's your approach to leadership?

Ranjit Kaur: That's a difficult question. My personal approach?

Moderator: Yes.

Ranjit Kaur: It's a funny one this, because if someone says to me that question, I don't see myself as somebody who's a leader or has been a leader.

Moderator: You obviously are.

Ranjit Kaur: Well, I've managed organisations, I've been in management positions, and I suppose I've been in a position where I've been able to influence things. The way I approach leadership is very much, I think based on I've seen so many bad practises in my life, you know, when I was a union official, I dealt with so many bad managers, women and men, that I basically, got into my head that if ever I was in that position, this was how I was not going to be like. So, I had a list of things in my head that I would not be like and I'll always remember when I got the job at Rights of Women, I went out for dinner with a friend and she said to me, she said, 'Oh, this job, you know, how do you feel about it?' and I said, 'I'm so

excited because I'm going to have the opportunity to make my mark on an organisation and basically be the kind of manager that I want to be. I want all those things. I can actually be the kind of manager with the supportive management committee. I can determine the kind of things we do and I'll have some say in that.'

She said, 'How much would you have?' and I said, 'Well, that's the negotiation that has to take place,' but I see no reason why we can't do those things. Why we can't ensure that, you know, we have a great working environment, that people are happy to come to work. That, you know, we are able to do things because we all believe in the same thing, we share the same goal, but we work collectively, we share ideas, we acknowledge when someone's done something good. When something has gone wrong, we don't blame, we talk about how we can do it better next time, we learn from that, you know, we learn from our experiences, and we're able to work in an environment where there's respect, but also, we acknowledge that people have got lives. (TC 00.20.00) We acknowledge the fact that people, particularly women, when you're working in an all women environment, there are going to be issues around childcare, more so than an all male environment. Childcare, maternity leave, you know, we're going to have to be more flexible, and we have to look at the pay. We have to look at the pay and we have to look at pensions, and what are we if we can't do that ourselves within a women's organisations? How can we expect others to do that for us, when we're not doing it for ourselves? So, they're the kinds of things I would-, well, I did, that's the agenda I brought to my role.

Moderator: So, could you explain or tell us something that you changed that you did?

Ranjit Kaur: I can give you a very specific example and it happened very early on. So, prior to going to Rights of Women, I was on a decent salary in the trade union movement, I had a company car, I had an excellent pension, I had benefits, I was secure in my employment, and I was going to a job that paid far less, it was a good, I'm talking about thousands of pounds difference, thousands. I'd lose my car and all the benefits, I'd lose my pension, at the time, I think the organisation I was going to was offering 3%, so I was losing massive benefits, and you know, there were people, there were friends of mine who said that they thought I'd lost my marbles, basically. Why would I do that? I said, because I felt it was right, it was what I wanted to do. I chose to do it, it was my choice, and even my boss at the union said he would keep my job open, if I wanted, because he was so certain that I would find it so hard. But the thing I did then was I spoke to the management committee at Rights of Women, at the time, and I said, 'Look, you know what I'm giving up to come here. You know, you've offered me the job, I'll take it, but on the basis of a number of things.' They said what were they, and I said, 'I obviously want to look at the pay scales here, the wages, but not just for myself. I want to look at everybody's, and I want to look at the pensions we offer, the terms of employment,' and you know, these are really important things to me, and they were happy to, said, 'Look, you're going to be the person responsible for bringing in the money, so if you are happy to bring in the money, we're happy.'

You know, if you can persuade the funders to give you the money for that, fine.' That is exactly what I did, or was able to do. I was actually raising not just my own salary but everybody else's, and as a consequence of that, women wanted to come and work. We were

able to accommodate all kinds of different working patterns and flexibility and, you know, with that, our sick leave fell. You know, we did have people, we had women with children, we had women who were doing other things, like, doing courses or some were teaching university. So, they wanted more flexible working times and things, and we were able to accommodate all that. So, that gave me a great deal of satisfaction and I feel particularly proud of doing that. It wasn't just that within my own organisation we did this, because then, along with Viv, who's the Chief Exec at the Women's Resource Centre, and Sarbjit Ganger, who's at the Asian Women's Resource Centre, we had a meeting of women's organisations. At the time, our funder, our biggest funder for all these groups was the London Borough Grants, LBG, at the time, or London councils, and they were funding these women's organisations, and it was decided that we had to form some collective policy on the kinds of things that we wanted across the board, in terms of funding.

So, on that list of things were things like we wanted them to look at maternity provision. We wanted them to look at pensions, because they were giving funding, but they weren't thinking about all these other issues. Caring responsibilities for women, dependant care. So, the women at this meeting agreed that this would be a good thing, the collective meeting we had, and then, they decided that the three of us, because we seemed to be the most vocal were the three that were to go and do the negotiating, and that was quite interesting, but it was also very worthwhile. So, the three of us would go in and we'd meet the chair of the London Borough Grants and the Senior Officer who was responsible, and we had very constructive talks with them, and we did raise the funding for the sector, and we hope that made a difference. It was important for not just our own organisations but for everybody else, for all these smaller ones that, you know, couldn't manage it. If you could get the philosophy thing, if you can get one funder to change, a big funder, you can get the others to look at this too.

Moderator: So, what do you think are the specific characteristics of being a leader in the women's sector?

Ranjit Kaur: Now, or generally, or-,

Moderator: Both, because I imagine some of those characteristics don't change.

Ranjit Kaur: Yes. You'd hope they wouldn't change. You'd think there would be a set of characteristics that you'd look for a leader in the women's sector, or a leader anywhere, indeed, and I think the list would include things like being constructive, communication, being bold, I think is important. Integrity, really important, the two most important characteristics are, to me, integrity and fairness, really important to be both in your day-to-day practice. Also, being open to talk to other women, individually or as a group. I hope I've always been open to, you know, talking to the women that contacted me at the time I was at Rights of Women, but beyond that, I still talk to a number of women who contact me, and I've always been open to doing that. I think it's also about sharing, you know, sharing your experiences, sharing your ideas, opportunities, giving women opportunities. I mean, one of the ideas I thought was a good one, but I'm not sure my colleagues always thought was a good one, was my obsession with training and ensuring that they developed their skills. Now, sometimes, I suspect they thought that I was more concerned about their skills than they

were. It may have come across as that, but I had this practice of ensuring that we had meetings every six to seven weeks, one-to-one supervision as they're called in the sector.

During those, we would talk about their training needs, it would be a standard item, and I remember sometimes, some of them would not be convinced that they needed any training, but I'd always manage to find something that they could think about. I remember some of them saying, 'Well, you know, I'm not sure I would use that,' and saying, 'Well, you might find that it's something you may want to do in the future.' I found, at first, particularly things like media training, (TC 00.30.00) because I think this is something that is a problem in the women's sector, being seen on TV, talking to the radio, it terrifies the best of us, and getting other women to go and be trained, I think does worry them because they think, 'Oh, no, I'm going to have to do this and I don't really want to do it.' Public speaking is terrifying, but then, if you said to someone, 'Look, we'll give you the skills,' and that was something, you know, some of them, at first, didn't think was a great idea, but then when they went on it, they felt more confident to be able to do that. Ironically, as time went on, they were happy to do it, you know, it became something they could put down on their CVs for the future. So, it's all these factors together. It's the skills that you give people. It's the encouragement you give them. It's the opportunities you open for them, yes, all these factors, a combination of them.

Moderator: Do you think men's leadership is different from women's leadership, their approach?

Ranjit Kaur: I think it is, definitely, but that's my personal view. Some people may not think that, but I think, because it's the way I think, I think it has to be different because, as women, we don't have the luxury of having a society where men are-, sorry, where women are in key posts, you know? If you look at the list of 100 chief execs of major companies, I do believe you'll find very few women, if at all any in that list. So, I don't think we have the luxury of looking at leadership positions and seeing a lot of women. I mean, you just look at, you know, when world leaders get together, there'll be Angela Merkel sitting there, maybe Jacinda Ardern, and Nicola Sturgeon, if she's had an invite, and a handful of others, Denmark now, but predominantly men. So, I think leadership has to be different, because we have a responsibility. If we're in a position, as women, to change that, then I think we have a responsibility to change the way in which we deliver the new women leaders of the future, and in order to do that, it's not a question of, 'I made it and I'm going to ensure no-one else does,' or, 'I've made it and I don't really care about anyone else,' that's the other. It's about saying, 'Well, I need to make sure I'm not the first and the last,' you know? If that's happened, then I've failed, you know? If that has happened, I have failed.

If there are no other leaders coming up, women leaders behind me, or I've not helped a few others, then nothing's going to change, and I think that is what's different, that's the main difference about male leadership and women's leadership. Men have the luxury of not worrying about that, because men will follow, you know, the next tranche of leaders will be men, and we have to work really hard. You know, we have to work twice, thrice as hard to make sure. I mean, I do feel some pleasure at looking back at the women that I've worked with, and some of them are in those positions now, and I don't know, I can't take credit. They'll take the credit for that, and rightly so, but part of me thinks, 'Well, I do feel better for

having worked in the sector and seen that,' and I hope that that will be their legacy too, a few more, because between us then, you know, if one leader has given rise to three or four, and those three or four give rise to twelve more, then we are breaking through that barrier.

Moderator: You've touched on this, what motivates you as a leader?

Ranjit Kaur: I think it's motivates me generally. I hate injustice. I can't stand unfairness, like, at school, I used to get involved in fights, because I couldn't stand bullying, you know, as a child, I'd get involved in things that other people, probably other children with more sense would walk away, but I'd find myself in the middle of it, because I just could not. I just can't stand it, and I've had this ever since I was a child, and my mother says this about me. She said, 'You just can't stop yourself,' and I think my sisters have it too, we just can't stop ourselves, and it's this great sense of, like, you've got to behave as you would have others behave towards you. My mother has drilled this into us, you know, 'Are they not a person too?' You know, I always remember this saying as a child, 'Are they not a person too?' The way you treat other people, they have feelings too. So, I think it's that. It's the fact that I want to be treated in a particular way, you know, I don't want things like my sex or my race or any characteristic I have to hold me back. Why should it hold anyone else back? So, for me, I think that is my motivation and that's what inspires me, within myself. They're my own ethics, you know, if I was to describe them, it'd be fairness and integrity, and a passion for justice. I've chosen careers and my career path reflects that, I hope, you know, and even now, I left the sector a while ago, but I worked as a consultant to the sector for years, and I still do it. I do it on a voluntary basis.

I mean, I'm now an author, I've written a book recently, but even that book is about women's experiences and the money from that book is going to two charities. So, it's something I still feel the need to do, and I still have women that I talk to and, you know, support and I'm happy to help where I can. It's just the way I am. It's inbuilt, and that's another thing, I'm not sure you can teach leadership. I think you can show people, you can teach people to be managers, you can't teach them to be good managers, you can teach them to be managers, and leadership skills, I think, what are we teaching? Are we teaching them to be leaders or are we teaching them to be, sort of, generally different people, different women, different skills, just generally, you know? Do we want everyone-, does everyone want to be a leader? You know, what does that actually mean? Do people realise that they're leaders? I certainly don't see myself as one. So, it's an interesting thing, isn't it? It's an interesting concept.

Moderator: What issues were and are dear to your heart? And how do you think you've influenced change? And again, you have spoken a little bit about this.

Ranjit Kaur: I have, and you know, without repeating, the issues dearest to my heart have been issues around equality, particularly around race and sex equality. Although I've also been involved in working on lesbian and gay issues, and working with disabled groups. For a period of time, I worked with all four of the so-called self-organised groups within Unison, and they were the four equality groups at that time. So I built up a lot of experience and knowledge of issues that affected those particular groups. Sorry, what was the second part of the question?

Moderator: How do you think you've influenced change?

Ranjit Kaur: That's a difficult one. I mean, am I the person to ask about that? How do I know if I've influenced anything, you know? I'd like to think I have, but I think the people to ask are the people that I've worked with, or the people that have used the services that I was responsible for. I mean, I'd like to think I have in terms of changing certain things, like, I'd like to think I've changed the way that women access justice. I've played a part in changing legislation, I've convinced politicians, I've convinced policy-makers of (TC 00.40.00) certain policies, so it's hard to answer that question.

Moderator: How, during your time at Rights of Women, did the organisation influence change?

Ranjit Kaur: Well, during my time there, we certainly involved ourselves in a number of issues and campaigns. And we involved ourselves in engaging with government, with politicians generally, with policy-makers, with people responsible for developing policy and strategy elsewhere, with funders. I couldn't think of many issues where we didn't have influence or we shouldn't have influence, so I made it my business to ensure that we were at the table, or we were involved in some way. So to give you an example, after the July bombings in London, the Metropolitan Police had a meeting, they called a meeting, to discuss the impact of the July bombings on women across London, and I was invited to represent the sector. Now, I suspect I was invited because they saw me as somebody who could reflect a particular voice. I mean, I had already attended a number of meetings, and spoken at meetings on that issue and the impact, particularly on black women across London. So to me, to be invited to speak and give or tell, you know, obviously of the experiences that I'd heard of, and what impact it had had, was quite important, and it allowed that to be documented. But I did say to them at the meeting, you know, I said, and this is hopefully documented, because I think the thing is still available, saying, 'You know, you need to go out and talk to go to women's groups. You need to get out there and form those discussions with women out there, to talk about the impact of stuff like this,' particularly as at the time, you know, there was quite an emphasis on talking to women within particular groups. And my view was that the best way to engage and have a two-way discussion was to go out and do that. You know, I am not speaking for all women, I am not the oracle for all women. And therefore, you know, they're asking me for a view, my view is go out and talk to them, you know?

Moderator: And did they?

Ranjit Kaur: Probably not. I think the other problem we have, and no doubt we'll come on to this, I think in the sector, is who is seen as the voice of the sector? And when somebody says, 'I am the voice of the sector,' or perceived as the voice of the sector, other voices become silenced. And I think we've got to be careful, in the women's sector, of not creating a hierarchy where we have queen bees at the top or, you know, we don't want the blue-eyed boys being replaced by the blue-eyed girls. And I think to some extent, that's happened, or that's happening. Because, you know, there are lots of little groups that never get-, a lot of women's groups that do fantastic work and have, you know, first-rate experience of working in communities, and they're not the ones who you will see being asked. It's the same people, the same women, and I think we've got a problem if we don't look at this.

Moderator: And how do you think it can be resolved?

Ranjit Kaur: I think it's been going on for quite a while, it is one of my concerns that this has happened for quite a while. And it's one of the reasons, no doubt this was probably going to be one of your questions at the end about the change in the sector generally, but I think it's a wider strategy than simply this point. I think it's about how we are losing ground on many things that we achieved. I think our successes as women towards gaining a level playing field, because that's what equality in my mind is about, it's not saying that women are better than men, but we are no less, you know, we should be treated equally. And basically, if those steps that we've taken to create a level playing field has started to be eroded again, then we're going backwards. And I think part and parcel of dealing with this is collectively working together across the women's sector, you know, to have a strategy, to have a voice. And the strategy has to deal with things like we've got to be able to (a) respond to issues collectively, we've got to get ourselves coverage, we've got to be seen to, you know, to get our message out there, but we've got to have a plan. Like, what are we trying to achieve? We've got to have political clout, we've got to be listened to, and in order to do that, we've got to show that we are, you know, representing thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of women. I mean, I remember as a trade unionist in a branch where I used to work in Edinburgh as a civil servant, our membership went up over the years I was the branch chair.

And we got about 94% of the membership of that branch of civil servants were our members, and I know the power of collectivism, because sometimes I didn't even have to do anything. I'd say to the managers there, 'If you don't deliver or agree to talking about A, then I can guarantee that we can get people walking out of here within a day. So I knew that I had 94% of civil servants in that area ready to go, and that's enough to persuade management to take us seriously. I mean, it would be irresponsible to use that every two minutes, but on serious issues you'd had to. And it's the same thing in the women's sector, I think we need to have a strategy of engagement across, you know, with strategy-makers, policy-makers, politicians, et cetera. We need our own strategy for the sector, how we deal with funders. Because we are now getting led, I think, too much by funders' agendas, and we're being led by policy. There's this complaint, and I've heard it time and time again in the women's sector now, that women's groups are having to change what they do to accommodate what funders want them to do. Whereas, you know, I think it should be more about what requirements we're meeting, what needs we're meeting out there, delivering those services, and communicating to funders, 'Look, this is what we're doing, these are the changes we're making, these are the needs of the community,' not because someone else is determining what your agenda is. And I think we need to share more, you know, we need to behave like leaders not just in our own organisations, but across the board. And that means we need to share ideas. Don't be afraid to share.

I mean, I was happy to give my policies to everybody else, you know, I was happy to share the work that I'd done. I mean, I remember in my first few months there I shared something with somebody, you know, I'll not name the organisation, but she was shocked. She said, 'Nobody does this,' and I said, 'What? Why wouldn't I give you this?' I said, you know, 'Why wouldn't I do that?' So why reinvent the wheel? Why not share what works? I mean, why not have a women's assembly where we all get together occasionally? I mean, I remember the

Women's Resource Centre had an event that I spoke at, and I think it was September 11th 2007, I think it was, and it was about the future of the women's sector. And I asked people in that, there was an audience of about 100 groups represented there, and I asked them for three things that we could agree on (TC 00.50.00), all of us, to take forward. We could not agree on three things. You know, we couldn't agree. I mean, okay, time was limited, but unless we do this, we are going to close one by one. There is going to be no women's sector, and all the gains that we fought for are going to be slowly diminished. I mean, you know, we still haven't achieved equal pay, we still haven't got rid of domestic violence, sexual harassment is growing. You know, these are not new problems, these were around when I was younger. I'm going to be, you know, retirement age soon, and these are still ongoing issues. So when I was younger, older women used to say to me, 'It will change in our time,' I mean, has it changed?

Moderator: How has your involvement in the sector impacted on you personally?

Ranjit Kaur: At times I think it's not been good for my health or wellbeing. I do think working on equality issues does impact greatly on your wellbeing, I really do. And I don't mean that as a joke. I think because we're working on people's minds, rather than just saying to them, 'Just change the way you are,' it is very hard and stressful to work in an environment that at the moment is quite toxic, and has never been welcome to change. You know, nobody has given up power without a fight, no-one has given anyone any rights. You know, for anyone to assume, sitting there, that anything was given to them without somebody giving something, is farcical. And it takes a lot of energy. I mean, I've trained people in equality, I've trained the police, I've trained, you know, very resistant trade unionists, I've trained people who I've walked into the room and I've heard their murmurs. And, you know, I've had arguments with people. Not once have I ever walked out of a room or shouted, or been shouted at, I've always, hopefully, managed to get some points across, but it is hard work. You are working on people's-, what's here. You know, policies about 'if you behave like X', this is where the law does fail. Because just saying to somebody, 'If you behave like X, then Y is going to happen to you,' might just change their behaviour sometimes, but it doesn't always change what's up here. And if you're working on changing someone's mentality, you're saying to someone, like, 'Domestic violence is wrong, it's a crime, it's against human rights. This is what it does to you as a perpetrator, but more importantly, this is what it does to the person you're doing it to,' it is working on someone's whole head process, you know?

On their everything, really. It's like sexual harassment, it's the same thing, and these are not easy areas to work on. So I think it has had an impact, you know, we could all choose an easier life. We could work in housing law, basically just doing land registry, which would be an easy life. But whether I would be happy as a person doing that, whether I would feel I'd led a fulfilled life, is another argument. But we choose, you know, these are choices that we make, and some of us have made those choices. And, you know, we don't regret them, but there have been consequences. And you get, you know, I've had the hate mail, I used to get a lot of abuse at certain times in my life, certain points in my life. I've had hate mail, I've had threats, and these are not pleasant things to get, you know? To get someone telling you that they're going to kill you, or whatever, is not nice. And there's more of that, that's a growing thing, I think, with the Internet allowing, you know, Twitter and those sort of platforms. And I think it's something that needs to be dealt with. I think the government's been very slack in dealing with this, I think there's got to be stronger penalties. And again, it's about minds, isn't

it? It's about working on people. So these are not easy options, to work in the sector, and I truly admire every single person, every single woman, who works in the women's sector. It's not easy, particularly at this time and the kind of environment we have to work in.

Moderator: How has Rights of Women, and the women's sector as a whole, influenced and changed women's structural position in the UK?

Ranjit Kaur: What do you mean by structural position?

Moderator: I suppose, structural position, so their legal and social position.

Ranjit Kaur: Okay. As I say, I think sometimes it is perhaps easier to have legal consequences, or to have an employer introduce a practice, a set of rules. What is harder is changing society, and I think that most organisations working on women's issues have been better at dealing with the legal implications. Like, now we have the Forced Marriage Act, we have injunctions around domestic violence, we have child contact orders, we've got laws on sexual harassment, we've got a whole plethora of legislation. But I'm not sure we've changed society attitudes that much. I mean, you know, you don't have to go far to see that attitudes have not changed. I mean, you know, anyone that's sat on a jury in a rape trial will tell you that. Or sat on a jury anywhere where there's some kind of sex discrimination argument, will tell you that. So I think we've been better at dealing with issues that present themselves, and we feel as though we could campaign to change them in a legal sense, but we've been less influential, I believe, in respect of changing society's attitudes. So I think that has been a consequence of how we think in the women's sector. We think that our successes are simply measured by the changes that we make in the legal environment, rather than the changes that we make in terms of society generally. And I think another example I can think of in this regard is that-, and this is where I think we have failed across the women's sector, is engaging ordinary women.

You know, where are the cleaners? Where are the nurses? When we look at the women's sector, and this is not to disrespect the women that have studied women's studies and the rest of it, you know, there is a great advantage in women having gone on those sort of courses, had those qualifications, and getting involved in women's organisations as a consequence of those experiences. But what worries me is we've failed to engage the ordinary women out there. And talking to other women, and I've spoken to Viv about this, and she equally, I think, shares this view, is that we've not been that good at engaging those women. And maybe these are, like, the better working (TC 01.00.00) with trade unions in collaboration may have been a better policy, or could be a better policy, because they are working with those sets of women, and we need to make the link. You know, how is it that Spain can have a strike of women where women across the country, millions of them, walked out? You know, I go to King's Hospital, and I have a nurse that I used to work with, she's moved on, but she was from Spain. And she told me that on the day the strike in Spain took place, her mother walked out of the family home, and her father turned to her mother and said, 'Why are you striking? You're a housewife, you don't work,' and the mother said, 'How dare you. You know, you'll find out today when you have to do the cleaning and the shopping.' She said, 'I'm not doing anything, I'm putting down my apron and I'm off,' you know?

And I cannot imagine us getting a strike like that in this country, and I think we've got to ask ourselves why. You know, in Latin America they've had similar action. In France they manage a women's strike. And I think this is our failure to engage across, you know, all women. When we're giving advice, say as an advice-giving charity in the women's sector, we may be advising the cleaner, the nurse, but the thing is, when it comes to looking at the society issue, you know, the question earlier, then those women, are they engaging with women's issues in the way that we would want them to? Are we engaging with them? Are they one-off, sort of, users of our service, and move on? You know, where is the link between us as women across the sector, that we can deliver? And I think that would be real change, that when we get women like that, you know, across the board, working with us on issues, we'll get a greater change in society's attitudes.

Moderator: What do you think are the greatest achievements of women's collective action?

Ranjit Kaur: Well I think the best example, you know, the suffragettes. If it wasn't for the suffragettes, we wouldn't have the vote and representation. And if we hadn't had the vote, you know, no-one would give a toss what women thought. You know, we wouldn't get the changes that were necessary. And political representation has been very important, however, we can't always be sure-, I think people are learning this now, that just because you elect a woman, doesn't mean that that woman is going to be a woman who supports women's issues. You know, this is about the blue-eyed girls replacing the blue-eyed boys. But that is something that I think we have to accept, you know, as a fact it's going to happen. If you're wanting women to have equality, then you've got to accept that not all women that are going to benefit from that are going to be women that are going to support you or your cause once they get there. Sorry, could you repeat the question again?

Moderator: It was the greatest achievements of women's collective action.

Ranjit Kaur: Yes, so I think that, I think the fact we got the vote. But over time, I think changes like the Equal Pay Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, all the legislation around domestic violence, sexual violence. And this has all come about because women have challenged, you know, some brave, courageous women, and some excellent lawyers, have taken a case somewhere, and changed the law. And as I said earlier, it's not because some lawmaker decides it's a good idea, it's because, you know, women have led a campaign to change it, as various women's groups have done over the years and continue to do. You know, the successes are fewer but they're still happening, we're still creating these changes, it's just a lot slower and it takes a lot more work. So, you know, those changes are good, and the fact we can make a difference justifies the existence of the women's sector.

Moderator: What do you think still needs to be done?

Ranjit Kaur: Oh, gosh. There's so much that still needs to be done. I mean, we don't have a society where women are treated as equals. I think all the things I mentioned earlier. I think we have to work more on society's attitudes. I mean, what good are all these rights to me if I still get sexually abused, and racially abused? What good has that done me, you know? I mean, I might feel good knowing I have them, but then I have to exercise them, you know?

Then the onus is on me. If I get racially abused, or sexually abused, when I go out the house, the onus is on me to take action. Whereas I think, you know, if you had society acting, then it'd be like smoking now. I mean, we are capable of doing it, you know? And smacking children, I mean, you know, as a child I remember it was like free-for-all in terms of smacking children, but now, if you saw a child smacked, I'm sure someone would phone the police. You know, or a dog being kicked or something, or someone smoking where they shouldn't, there'd be outrage. So we've got to make things that happen to women and, you know, whether it's racism, whether it's homophobia, or whether it's any form of discrimination, we've got to make it that unacceptable. That it's not just for the person to say, 'Oh, I've got to phone the police, I've just had my head kicked in,' or 'I've just been spat at,' or 'I've just been called a, you know, this or that.' That other people will say, 'Hey, that's not acceptable,' and people don't feel able to behave like that.

You know, and we've got to start in schools, we've got to start early. You know, we've got to start, and we've got to look at the media, we've got to look at our politicians, we've got to look at our own behaviours. I mean, it doesn't help when, you know, the papers are full, and the news is full at the moment, and people are saying things that wouldn't have been acceptable. That's what I mean by going backwards, you know, something that would have been shocking. I mean, I always hated the term 'political correctness', I hated that term because I had a feeling that that would be used to justify bad behaviour at some point, you know, and I think that's exactly what's happened. I mean, Linda Bellos who is another woman I do admire greatly, I don't always agree with her, but I do admire her. At a time when these things were considered, you know, outrageous and never going to be introduced, she fought for equality policies at Lambeth Council, one of the first councils, when she was the leader, to introduce them. And I think she was a trailblazer, she saw the importance of these things. And we lose these things at our peril. Someone, as I say, has introduced them and fought for them, yet they're getting chipped away. And that's the challenge, the challenge is to stop the chipping and to refocus on the goal. And the goal is to create an equal society.

Moderator: So what are your thoughts on the future for women's rights?

Ranjit Kaur: I'm not hugely optimistic about the current climate being open to women's equality being achieved sooner than it could be. I am however encouraged by a lot of girls and young women coming through. I do believe that we do have to look at, you know, after saying everything I've said about leadership, we do have to look about the future. And as early as-, (TC 01.10.00) I was trying to remember what year it was, it was about 2008, after I worked for Rights of Women, Linda Durrant, who was the women's officer for Unison in the Eastern region at the time, and myself, put in an application to the Feminist Review Trust to run a leadership course for women in the sector. At that time, it was a novel idea. And this was, I'm talking about ten, eleven, twelve years ago now. I was worried at that stage that we were going to have a problem if we didn't start thinking about leadership. So we got the money, we got a grant of £4,500, and we advertised this course, it was going to be a two day course that Linda and I run. We were inundated with applications. The criteria was you had to work in the women's sector, to give us reasons why you wanted to attend, what you'd get out of it. And so we ran it for two days, we had twenty women, they all turned up on both days, promptly. We had amazing discussions and some amazing women, group of women.

I mean, I truly left that inspired myself, after spending two days. And we had Pragna Patel from Southall Black Sisters come and give a talk and answer questions, and Viv came down and answered questions, spoke to them, you know? But that, you know, now when I think about it, that was eleven years ago and there seemed to be a bit of a gap for a while, and I'm really pleased that WRC are doing this work at least. But I just think that the women in positions of leadership now, if you want to call them that, I call them the chief execs and the leaders or the managers in the sector, really need to think very carefully now about the future of the sector. And not just about dealing with the problems of here and now, because there will be no sector to think about in the future unless they start concentrating now and thinking about it. I mean, it struck me eleven years ago or even more, so I do fear-, and because of the political climate, as I say, there is definitely a backlash going on, you know, against women's organisations at the moment. There is a mainstreaming of the sector, and my worry is that we'll be mainstreamed out of existence if we don't start working together and having a strategy, and thinking about what steps we need to take, and promoting the work that we do. We're so busy doing it we forget to promote it. I mean, I've always said to women in the sector, I once phoned up a national newspaper to place an advert, and I was astonished at the price of an advert.

This was at Rights of Women, I was just going to find out how much it cost, and then you think about the amount of publicity you get from writing a letter or getting a story in the newspaper, and the cost of an advertisement. You know, so there are different ways of engaging the media, and I think we've got to get better. I mean, most of the women I've spoken to about this say, 'That's all great, but we don't have the time,' but it's like, sometimes you have to make some sacrifices in the area of A to gain a bigger-, it's like what we were discussing earlier about, you know, sometimes getting knocked back, but getting a better product out of it, a better deal out of it. And sometimes you have to do that, you have to sacrifice something. And it's what I did at RoW sometimes, I had to sacrifice something to get something better. And you have to do that if you want to get a better situation, something has to go. But then what are you gaining? And maybe we don't make the links as we should, because every bit of publicity might mean something for the funder to note, you know, has its benefits for society to note, that makes a difference.

Moderator: We've covered everything. Is there anything that you would like to add that you haven't said so far?

Ranjit Kaur: No, I think you've asked a number of questions that cover most of the areas that I would have spoken about if you'd asked me generally about the sector. My only wish is that, you know, that we continue to have a strong sector. And I hope that, you know, we can persuade the powers that be that it's something that benefits all of us, not just women, to have that. You know, no-one should feel threatened by that, we're a better society for having it. Thank you.

Moderator: Well thank you very much, Ranjit. Yes, thank you very much for sharing your experience.

Ranjit Kaur: Pleasure.