



## FiliA Hague Mothers Statement

### Parliamentary debate on International Parental Child Abduction

28 April 2026

*The FiliA Hague Mothers campaign aims to end the injustices of the Hague Abduction Convention, specifically for mothers and children who are victims of domestic abuse in all its forms. Mothers flee with their children in order to find safety, a last-resort option when the state has failed in its safeguarding duty.*

*Around 75% of Hague cases are brought against mothers by left-behind fathers. Evidence suggests that the vast majority are attempting to escape physical, psychological, economic or legal abuse.*

On 28 April 2026, a debate on international child abduction took place in UK Parliament. It was led by MP Rachel Gilmour and focused on issues raised by left-behind parents - mostly fathers.

These included:

- a lack of international consistency in applying the Convention, referencing a Polish case where return decision was reversed at appeal;
- the 'creeping expansion of article 13(b) welfare arguments as a basis for refusing return';
- the insufficient use of protection measures;
- child maintenance orders creating a 'perverse result' of financially rewarding abductors.

We have serious concerns regarding the implications of each of the issues raised in the debate, none of which consider the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivor mothers and children.

In cases involving domestic abuse and coercive control we consider it essential that appeals are allowed and the decisions of foreign courts accepted, both as a matter of simple justice, and to provide an opportunity for a more in-depth consideration of the evidence and thus of the best interest of the child. Similarly, Article 13(b) offers the only opportunity for victims of abuse to evidence their claim that return would lead to a 'grave risk' or 'intolerable situation' for the child. The evidence threshold is high and, if the defence is accepted, a no-return decision is the appropriate response. There is extensive evidence

(domestically and internationally) that protective measures are inadequate; they should never be used in cases where the grave risk defence is accepted. On the matter of maintenance, these payments are generally for the child rather than the mother and cannot be considered as a 'financial reward' for abduction.

The debate concluded with a response from the Minister for Consular Affairs in which he reiterated the Government's commitment to undertaking research into the intersection of domestic abuse and the Convention. We very much welcome this commitment. There is very little official data on this topic; a lack of evidence that limits current understanding of the significant difference between harmful and protective abductions, and the effectiveness of the Convention in relation to the best interests of the child.

The government's new Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) strategy states 'Violence against women and girls is a global issue that no country can tackle alone. The UK works with international partners to share evidence, learn from best practice, and apply proven approaches'.

As part of its commitment to halve violence against women and girls in a decade, the UK has an opportunity to lead the way in ensuring the safety of children and their mothers who are forced to flee because of domestic abuse. This must include changes to the implementation of the Convention to prioritise the safety of survivors - mothers and their children - and support their right to live free from violence.

**FILiA Hague Mothers**

May 2026