

## **Reclaim The Night 2023 – Speeches**

- Imogen and Loz
- Sohini
- Kate Green
- Aisha

### **1. Aisha To introduce speeches & Rally**

### **2. Loz, Student – Feminist Collective & Imogen, Student- Resist Rape Culture**

Reclaim is not a women's march - it is a march for all genders against sexual violence. The transgender and nonbinary population is not a silent one, it cannot be an invisible one. I don't want the image of white, cisgendered, second wave feminism to be the image that represents tonight. I wanted a trans speaker at this event, and the best representation that we could find somehow ended up being me. I am in a position of privilege, I'm white, and I'm also able-bodied. But I have also spent the past two years at these marches watching nobody who represented me, who actually acknowledged that trans people experience sexual violence in a different way. If I am the best that can be provided tonight to illuminate the struggles of the trans community, then so be it. The trans and non-binary community has always and will always be a part of the feminist movement and the fight against sexual violence.

Researching this speech was futile. The transgender community is treated as practically non-existent in these discourses. The services are practically non-existent, the willingness to understand the intersection of transness and sexual violence is practically non-existent, and the studies on how this affects the transgender community are practically non-existent. And when it does exist, it is bleak. If one of the only statistics I could find is one in which the majority of trans people claim accessing help means that they will either have to misgender themselves, or have to reduce their gender to their anatomy, then this just emphasises how neglected we are as a community.

Trans existence is beautiful. To be trans, non-binary, or any form of gender non-conforming is beautiful. That beauty cannot be made to be

taken away through experience of sexual violence. Services need to be tailored to a less binary, cisgendered survivor. The language of 'women' and 'girls' isn't good enough, reducing the survivor to the idea of someone who can only be cisgendered and female isn't good enough. We are all vulnerable, especially trans individuals. The transphobia that permeates the UK, most of all from within the government itself, reinforces lies and prejudice. We are vulnerable, and our existence is definitively not a threat. If simple matters like language are already a barrier, then it is almost impossible to comprehend the leaps and bounds support needs to take to fully include trans people.

There is no conversation about the uniqueness of the trans survivor experience. Sexual assault is a double violation for us. It is a violation of sexual and bodily autonomy for all individuals. And a violation of the trans process of creating harmony between your body and gender. A long process, a necessary process, and a process that does not have any right to be shattered by selfish individuals. How are you meant to reconcile a violation of a body that already holds dysphoria? There needs to be an understanding of these complexities, or more so a willingness to understand. To not force trans and non-binary individuals to favour solitude. If we are standing in solidarity tonight of all who have faced sexual assault and gender-based violence, then we must stand hand-in-hand with the trans community, and we can start doing this by really and truly listening. To recognise that we, as trans people, are vulnerable to coercion, sexual assault and gender-based violence due to our identity. From a threat of outing, false validation of our bodies, and making us feel weak due to our identities.

Trans representation within all movements against sexual violence, including Reclaim, is a glaring problem. But it is part of a wider system that creates poor visibility for those who are already marginalised, both historically and contemporarily.

(Imogen)

- We know that Reclaim was started in Leeds in 1977 as part of the WLM, but do the women who started this truly represent the students who march today?
- WLM- white middle class movement
- So, how do we define coercion?
- Not just sexual coercion but coercion is seen in our friendships
- Ultimately, Reclaim should represent the developments in who attends and how we think about the themes

- Therefore, I represent resist rape culture as a space in which we diversify the conversation around sexual violence and create a space away from mainstream campus politics

Reclaim the Night was started in Leeds in 1977, as part of the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement. This movement was a white, middle class movement. Understanding the origins of Reclaim raises one question, is it truly representative of those who march in the present day? Representation in terms of class, queer identity and ethnicity need to be at the forefront of these changes. Once we raise these questions, the definitions around coercion must also be expanded. We are not only impacted by coercion in terms of sexual abuse, but also in our friendships and workplace relations. Reclaim must represent those who attend, and therefore discussions around the themes we discuss must also diversify. As chair of Resist Rape Culture, I intend to offer you all a space in which we diversify the conversation around sexual violence and create a space away from mainstream campus politics.

### **3. Sohini- Student, Resist Rape Culture**

I wanted to expand on how minorities are affected by coercion and how coercion is not just sexual or as explicit as we think it is. Societal norms reinforce coercive practices within all relationships. We fail to teach children consent and when we bring up the concept later in life, people are unable to take accountability for their own actions. The way we are taught to build relationships shows how coercion is integrated into our daily lives. One example is how hook-up culture is inherently coercive and the consequences of these mainly affect young fem-identifying people. The idea that sex is a requirement for healthy relationships and that feminine-identifying people need to perform according to expectations reinforces coercion and rape culture. This affects everyone but particularly asexual people who lack representation. There is an expectation in relationships which puts pressure to conform to patriarchal ideals of relationships that there is only completeness in the nuclear family. One-size fits all ideals mean that people are coerced into relationships they don't want. This leads to children being brought up in toxic environments and they learn that coercive power dynamics are the norm.

Another very different and recent example is when Parliament voted for or against a ceasefire in Gaza. The number of Members of Parliament who abstained and the number of MPs resigning or risking their jobs to vote for a ceasefire shows how those with power are still being backed

into a corner. If people with power are being coerced into standing with violence, it shows how almost everyone experiences a form of coercion in their lifetime. Systems define what is acceptable and disempower the voices of minorities.

This march should highlight voices of minorities in their struggles against coercion. I cannot represent all people of colour but the fact this is currently the best representation we have demonstrates how desperately we need to highlight students of colour within these spaces. It also demonstrates my privilege as I can stand here and speak out against oppression. Speaking out, expressing opinions, and sharing experiences are privileges we take for granted. As a society we encourage people to fit into boxes and not speak out when they're uncomfortable in those boxes. Even when we do, we fail to take into account minorities. Speaking out is not an option if the consequences of doing so put peoples' lives at risk. I do not fit into a box of just a woman. I do not fit into a box of just a person of colour. I do not fit into a box of just queerness. I am all of these and will fight as all of these.

I'd also like to talk about accountability. We fail to hold people accountable when they have coerced others or encourage coercive practices. This is due to the lack of education around consent and coercion but also because there is no agreed upon culture or community standards about accountability. Another issue is that many people deny accountability because they feel shame. There needs to be open conversations about guilt and shame. Guilt is feeling bad about actions and what has been done and can be healthy. Shame is feeling bad about who you are. Guilt and shame need to be acknowledged as emotions and perpetrators need to be aware of these emotions in order to accept responsibility for their actions. We cannot have restorative justice without accountability. We cannot keep putting this burden on survivors and minorities, which subjects them to further abuse.

If this sounds repetitive and like this has been addressed before, it's because it is and it has. Gender-based violence is just as bad as it was when we addressed it at Reclaim last year and we stood here agreeing that we needed to do better. We've said the police need to do better. Education about consent needs to be better. Representation needs to be better. Our response to gender-based violence needs to be better. Currently people are not convicted and if they are, it is not stopping the culture. Our response to this is simply to increase policing and reinforce patriarchal norms that keep men in power and victim blame gender minorities. As much as we want perpetrators to take accountability, this

will only happen if there's structural change that creates a culture around listening to those affected. Us raising awareness at this march is the bare minimum, this needs to be followed by collective action and people with power changing the policy and response to coercion and gender-based violence.

#### **4. Kate Green, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester**

Tonight we are marching together to assert the right of every woman to be and feel safe - everywhere.

At work, at home, exercising, commuting, socialising, indoors or out, on our streets, anywhere, and at any time – there must be no no-go areas for women.

But today – 46 years after the very first Reclaim the Night protests took place, including here in Manchester - still too often women are reluctant to go out and about at night, still too often we feel uneasy when walking alone, still we find ourselves curtailing our choices, our lives - because of anxieties about our safety.

And while I don't want any woman's life to be restricted through fear, is it any wonder we're nervous, we're cautious, we are hesitant - when we know that since those first Reclaim the Night marches almost a half century ago, 140 women have been murdered on average each year – and women remain at greatest risk of gender based violence.

The mayor, Andy Burnham, and I are determined that every woman in GM should be and feel safe to go about her daily life, free of fear of abuse, harassment and violence.

Our 10 year GBV strategy sets out our commitment to achieving that, and we have given priority to funding initiatives to protect and empower women.

By next year we will have invested over £5m in the Safer Streets programme, supporting initiatives such as improved street lighting and cameras.

TfGM's Travel Safe campaign focuses on safety on public transport – and you may have noticed the platform announcement screens sharing information right now on how to report discreetly online to GMP's live chat if you have a concern about your safety.

Our Good Night Out guide has been issued to thousands of students and others enjoying our nighttime economy, and we're supporting our local town centres across GM with nighttime safety measures.

And the mayor personally launched and has led our award-winning #IsThisOK campaign, calling on men and boys not to be bystanders in the face of abuse and harassment of women and girls - because our brothers, fathers, husbands, partners and friends are our champions and allies.

Tonight we demonstrate our determination to be safe, to be visible, to be free to choose to live our lives everywhere and at anytime. These are our streets and we claim the right to this public space. I am proud to march with you.

## **5. Aisha, Wellbeing & Liberation Officer**

Hello! I'm Aisha Akram - your elected Wellbeing and Liberation Officer at the Students Union.

Just a trigger warning for my speech of: Coercion, Sexual Assault, Transphobia

As someone who identifies as a Queer, Muslim, South Asian woman who is also a sexual assault survivor, I want to stress the importance of intersectionality in spaces like these. Upon growing up, due to being raised in a community where sex wasn't a topic that was really talked about and nor was sexual violence, I was so naive to a lot of things. When there is so much stigma within a community, you can end up feeling so alone with what you're feeling and end up stuck in a culture of silence, with no place to talk. I was that person in a culture of silence, where I had experienced coercion in a previous long term relationship and never knew that coercion was something that was considered to be sexual assault. I never comprehended that pressure, subtle emotional manipulation and punishment after I said no would have such a massive toll on me, but it did and I stayed silent for at least a year after it happened and it was the worst year of my life. My experience and the experience from so many people is that coercion is underreported and is still incredibly stigmatised in society today, which is why I chose Convince Me Not as this year's Reclaim theme.

The idea of coercion surrounds the idea of control and pressure upon people and it angers me that we still have to have this conversational and tell people that pressure is coercive behaviour. It's becoming more and more apparent that coercive behaviour exists due to power imbalances that can affect how comfortable people feel to say no, which can be very low. Someone with a higher level of power for example may threaten someone with job loss, lower grades, a tarnished reputation, or other negative consequences if they say no, which is why people feel obliged to say yes. This statistically affects more marginalised communities.

And feminism in its history has not always been intersectional - it's been very exclusive and divisive but now more than ever, we are pushing for it to be more intersectional and consider that similar experiences will feel different depending on the intersection to which you belong in. As there is and was a huge negative stigma

surrounding violence and reporting, it therefore became increasingly clear that it would be difficult for people to reach out to family for support. As a woman, under-reporting is such a massive problem because the justice system stacks odds against us and expects us to climb mountains for months or years on end for even an ounce of justice.

Not to mention, feminism without including trans people is not feminism - you cannot stand up for equality without considering trans people in their entirety. Trans men are men and trans women are women - the exclusion of trans people in spaces like these are so harmful and dangerous. We stand here to fight for marginalised gender communities who face violence on a daily basis and we shouldn't stop until the number is at 0. For this to happen, we need to start at changing the culture of locker rooms, from the catcalling and unsolicited comments to more severe cases that affect people on a daily basis.

The amount of times I've had to protest for abortion rights, trans rights, Muslim rights and against mass violence that primarily affect women and marginalised gender communities is astounding - we shouldn't have to keep fighting for basic human rights!

Thank you for marching with us in our fight against gender based violence - you can enter our prize draw by donating to our two amazing charities: Southall Black Sisters and the LGBT Foundation who both do amazing work to support survivors. The prizes for the prize draw range from free academy gig tickets, some winter gear, to roller skating vouchers, to free bottomless brunch and drinks vouchers up to £100! You can also buy a pin badge for only £2 to support our charities if you haven't already bought one - donations are greatly appreciated and will help our organisations extend their work surrounding gender based violence!

I know winter is a difficult time to do a march so I want to highlight how thankful we as a Students Union that you came to march with us to fight for change.

Please take your banners home, have a good night and look after one another! We will see you next year ❤️