Forced Marriage to become a criminal offence on 16 June 2014

Anne-Marie Hutchinson OBE (pictured bottom left), Partner at Dawson Cornwell, will be giving an interview on BBC Radio 4’s Woman’s Hour on the criminalisation of forced marriage. The programme, airing at 10 a.m. on Monday 16 June 2014, will discuss the issues surrounding the Government’s decision to make forcing someone to marry a criminal offence, which comes into force in England and Wales on 16 June 2014.

Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (Part III, ss. 120 – 121) creates two new offences in England and Wales: breaching a Forced Marriage Protection Order without reasonable excuse (which attracts a sentence of up to 5 years’ imprisonment) and forcing someone to marry (attracting a maximum sentence of 7 years’ imprisonment).

Dawson Cornwell’s experience

Dawson Cornwell has pioneered the law for the protection of victims of forced marriage. Anne-Marie Hutchinson OBE was the first lawyer to bring the issue of forced marriage before the English High Court at a time when there were no laws directly dealing with the issue. Since then, Dawson Cornwell has appeared in excess of 200 cases involving forced marriage and Anne-Marie Hutchinson OBE helped to draft the Bill that became the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007. Dawson Cornwell also acted pro-bono for Dr Abedin, a GP who had been forced into a marriage in Bangladesh, in the first case in England and Wales to be brought under the 2007 Act.

Controversy

The criminalisation of forced marriage has been controversial. Proponents argue that it will deter perpetuators, while others argue that it may deter victims from coming forward if they feel that their close family will be imprisoned. The interplay between civil remedies and the criminal courts will be complicated and expert advice should always be sought.

Quote: Anne-Marie Hutchinson OBE

“There is a real danger that victims of forced marriage will be deterred from coming forward to seek protection from forced marriage if they fear that members of their close family will be imprisoned. It is imperative now that forced marriage has been criminalised, that victims receive full and proper support from the authorities throughout the process.”

Both Anne-Marie Hutchinson OBE (pictured left) (amh@dawsoncornwell.com) and Sulema Jahangir (right) (sj@dawsoncornwell.com) are available for interviews or further information.

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