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Sarah Owen
MP for Luton North

MPs, campaigners, and case studies available for interview upon request.

MPs to mark Hate Crime Awareness Week with demands for action to tackle 300% rise in covid-related racism against British Chinese and East Asians

Parliamentary Debate [Tuesday 13th October] on Chinese and East Asian communities' experiences of racism during the covid-19 pandemic

[Hate Crime Awareness Week takes place 10-17th October](#)



Sarah Owen MP (pictured in her Luton North constituency) is to lead MPs in a debate against anti-east Asian hate crime

Sarah Owen MP (pictured in her

Hate crime directed at Chinese, South East and East Asian people in the UK has trebled since the start of the covid-19 pandemic. With Hate Crime Awareness Week taking place next week, MPs will use a parliamentary debate to demand urgent action from government and warn that unless senior politicians on all sides take a vocal stand against this hate, then anti-east Asian racism will continue to rise.

Leading these concerned voices will be Labour MP Sarah Owen, the UK's first female MP of mixed Chinese/South East Asian Descent, who has herself been repeatedly targeted online. She will tell MP colleagues how racists have seen the pandemic as "an excuse almost to dehumanise, devalue and lump us together".

Incidents of hate crime experienced by these communities during the pandemic have been well documented. Reports have found multiple cases of Chinese owned businesses being attacked, [concerns early on in the outbreak about Chinese students fleeing the UK after 'maskaphobia' triggered racist attacks](#), and [police chiefs have warned that the far right is using coronavirus as an excuse to attack Asian people](#).

Amid deep, rising concerns about the Chinese government's record on human rights, Ms Owen will give a stark warning to MPs of all sides – including Labour colleagues – that as public opinion hardens against UK relations with the Chinese government, politicians have an urgent and pressing responsibility to protect British-Chinese people from hate as well as providing protection for those

seeking safety from Hong Kong and mainland China. She will call on all parties make sure that there is no space for racists in their organisation.

[A recent poll in the New Statesman](#) by Redfield and Wilson Strategies found that nearly half of all voters – 48% – identified China as a threat rather than an ally. That figure rises to 58% for Conservative voters, while 40% of Labour voters agree. 43% would like the UK to distance itself from the Chinese government, rising to more than half – 56% – of Conservative voters.

Politicians across the world have sought to cast blame for the virus on Chinese people. Most notably, Donald Trump has talked about the “China Virus”. In the UK, a cabinet minister was forced to apologise after sending a photograph on WhatsApp to a group of MPs showing a Chinese fortune cookie containing a piece of paper with the words: “You not have coronavirus.”

Conspiracy theories and racist caricatures have been spread online. Some have linked wet markets in China to negative stereotypes about Chinese people, others have stirred suspicions about the involvement of the Chinese government in the roll out of 5G, and that the virus was created in a Wuhan laboratory.

The government’s Counter Extremism Minister told a parliamentary committee earlier in the year that “I’ve been speaking to our hate crime lead, and there’s been a 21% uptick in hate incidents against the [south Asian] and [east Asian] community.”

MPs will debate the issue of Chinese and East Asian communities' experiences of racism during the covid-19 pandemic on Tuesday 13th October.

Hate Crime Awareness Week takes place annually and is organised by Stop Hate UK. This year it will be marked 10-17th October.

Sarah Owen is the Labour MP for Luton North and was elected in December 2019. She is Chair of Chinese for Labour, and the Vice-Chair of the Labour group of the anti-racist HOPE not Hate MPs.

Sarah Owen commented:

“Anti-Asian and anti-Chinese racism has unfortunately always existed, but the pandemic has lifted the lid and poured fuel on the fire for the far right. I’ve been sent videos on social media of animals being eaten alive, while also being accused of infiltrating British politics on behalf of the Chinese state.”

“We are experiencing racism from both ends of the spectrum - punching down, in a way to dehumanise us by implying we are all unclean at the same time as punching up, that we are all somehow part of a global conspiracy.”

“We have seen this ugly ‘othering’ before and now we need political leadership in the UK that manages to both hold the Chinese state to account for their disgraceful human rights record while ensuring that they do not give the green light to racists who would use this as a chance to spread yet more fear, hatred and division during a pandemic.”

“It shouldn’t need to be said that racism is not acceptable but unfortunately the media, MPs and Ministers have on occasions been unable to reach that low bar and it is the over one million of us Chinese, East and South East Asians living in Britain who are paying the price with their safety and livelihoods.”

Campaigner Viv Yau, along with five other women, has established a grassroots organisation called besea.n (Britain's East and South East Asian Network). Yau, who established a petition against using images of East and South East Asian people in media reports about COVID-19 in the UK - one which has amassed almost 15,000 signatures - added:

"East and South East Asian people are not to blame for the virus."

"It's been heart-breaking to see the rise in hate over the last few months. The media are perpetuating this through the irrelevant use of East and South East Asian imagery in COVID-related articles."

"On the surface, it's nuanced and harmless. Unfortunately the stark reality is that the effects are extremely detrimental; from people being verbally abused on the street, to online hate comments, to violent attacks not just towards British-Chinese people, but East and South East Asians who are racialised as Chinese. It's really important that MPs are taking notice of the problem. Politicians need to lead by example."

ENDS.

- *For further information and requests about this release, please contact Sarah Owen MP's Senior Parliamentary Assistant Jamie Ali on 07582652428 or by email on jamieb.ali@parliament.uk*

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