

Churches Update

News from the Labour Party

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Dismantling the sex trade

Labour's Equalities Minister speaks out against the exploitation of women

The Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Harriet Harman MP, has called for action against the sex trade. Harriet, who is also Minister for Women and Equality, outlined her concerns while speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme in December last year.

Harriet was on the show to discuss adverts for sexual services which often appear in publications such as local newspapers. In January, the Government published a report called "Women Not For Sale", which found that advertising women for sex is widespread in local and regional newspapers.

Speaking on the show, Harriet said that it is unacceptable that the same edition of a newspaper could contain both a harrowing story about the release of trafficked women from a local brothel, as well as

adverts for that same brothel in their classified adverts section.

"Do we think it's right in the 21st Century that women should be in a sex trade or do we think it's exploitation and should be banned?"

Harriet said that the Government is already responding to the evil of sex trafficking, for example by creating new laws and by supporting police operations. But she emphasised that combating exploitation of trafficked

women will require action by more than just the Government—community organisations, churches and other faith groups all have important roles to play.

She added, "When I was the solicitor general a few years ago I used to see cases and look at all the witness statements in the prosecution case and see girls bought and sold by criminal gangs in car parks in this country. We've got to stop the demand side or we'll never be able to protect girls."

Three Government ministers—Barbara Follett from the Government Equalities Office, Vernon Coaker from the Home Office, and Vera Baird, Solicitor General—will



travel to Amsterdam and to Sweden to look at how the problem is being tackled there. In Sweden the decision has been made to make it illegal to pay for sex, but not to sell it—so as to protect vulnerable women from criminalisation.

Meanwhile, in January 2008, the Home Secretary Jacqui Smith said that the Government intends to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings by the end of the year.

Jacqui said: "One of the vilest crimes that threaten our society is the trafficking of human beings. This horrendous crime is the product of organised criminality, whose business is to make money from human misery. That is why I am announcing today my intention to accelerate plans to ratify the Council of Europe Convention against trafficking."

The move follows a year in which sex trafficking has been highlighted as a political issue. Groups such as Stop the Traffik—a coalition which is administered by the Oasis Trust and which includes many Christian and faith-based organisations—have used the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade as an opportunity to campaign against modern-day slavery, including sex trafficking. It is a clear example of how churches and Labour can work together for good.

Tackling the global poverty “emergency”

In Gordon Brown’s first speech to the Labour Party Conference as Prime Minister, he outlined his Government’s commitment to fighting global poverty. Today, 72 million children around the world do not go to school and millions die every year from diseases we could cure. “I tell you today”, Gordon declared, “there is a global poverty emergency”.

The Labour Party is the party that is serious about tackling this emergency, and we have already made huge advances since we were elected in 1997. By 2010, we will have trebled the aid budget in real terms since 1997, from £2.1bn to £7.93bn. By contrast, the Tories halved it while they were in government.

The Labour Party has always sought to champion the cause of the poor. Not only is it in our interest to help the least fortunate in our international society, but we also have a moral responsibility to do so. And, because of our commitment to tackle poverty globally, we are already seeing impressive results.

It is estimated that programmes run by Britain’s Department for International Development lift around 3 million people permanently out of poverty every single year. We have also helped to abolish school fees in many countries in order to help them to build better futures for themselves. In Uganda this has resulted in an additional 2 million children being enrolled, while in Kenya an extra 1 million children have enrolled. We have also committed £1.2 billion to health spending in developing countries by 2010.

A message from Douglas Alexander



Labour’s International Development Secretary

The Labour Government takes seriously its responsibility to the world’s poor. The Department for International Development—set up in 1997 by Labour—has stepped up significantly the UK’s efforts to provide international development and relief.

It is clear to me that faith groups, such as churches, are our allies in this work. As seen in campaigns like Make Poverty History and in many development organisations, people of faith are transforming the lives of some of the world’s poorest people for the better through their work.

As International Development Secretary, I want to see this continue. I believe we really can work together to tackle global poverty and alleviate the suffering it brings.



Mme Annie Bupe (Uganda), holding her hoe. Photo: World Vision

In 2005, Britain took the presidency of the G8. We put the issue of Africa at the centre of our agenda and, under our leadership, the G8 subsequently agreed a historic package including increasing aid by \$50 billion a year by 2010, 100% debt cancellation and free education for all.

UK aid helps developing countries tackle poverty in a number of ways. We are committed to leading the international effort when disasters strike. For this reason, Britain is the main backer of the UN Central Emergency Response Fund, giving £163 million over four years (2006-2009). We are continuing to fight against killer diseases, such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. And we spent £323 million in 2006/7 to encourage good government across the world. Between 2002 and 2007, DfID also spent £1.88bn on health. A significant proportion of this money has been spent on women’s healthcare, for example making it easier for poor women to see a midwife or a doctor, and get emergency treatment during their labour. DfID will also spend £8.5 billion on education up to 2015.

We could not have done this on our own. A major reason for our success was the support we received from millions of people across the country through campaigns like Make Poverty History—a significant number of them from our churches. It was the same with the Jubilee 2000 campaign to cancel the debt of the world’s poorest countries. As a consequence of that campaign, we have written off 100% of debt owed by the world’s most Heavily Indebted Countries.

And in the coming months we are sure that churches and faith groups will again respond, this time to the Prime Minister’s ‘Call to Action’ to renew our efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals. For more information on the Call to Action, please see www.dfid.gov.uk/mdg or contact your local MP.

Tough decisions on human embryology

A message from **Stephen Timms MP, Labour's Vice Chair for Faith Groups**

In the next few months the House of Commons will debate the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. The UK is a world leader in research into human reproductive technologies, making groundbreaking medical and scientific advances. Current legislation – the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 – resulted from 1980s debates. Given technological advance and social changes, the law needs updating.

The Government has consulted extensively and carefully considered a wide range of views including a public consultation in 2005. In 2007 the Government published a draft bill. This was scrutinised by a joint committee of Peers and MPs, whose recommendations have been taken into account in drafting the Bill.

This new legislation will ensure that all human embryos outside the body – whatever the process used in their creation – will be subject to regulation. This will include any “human admixed embryos”, combining human and animal genetic material, that may be created while researching cures for currently untreatable disease, such as Parkinson's. The Bill allows this type of research to be carried out in principle, but the Human Fertilisation & Embryology

Authority will have to consider each individual request on its merits.

The Bill will also change the laws governing infertility treatments. At present when a clinic provides this treatment, it must consider the welfare of the child that would be born, including the need of the child for a father. The Government fully recognises the important role that fathers play in their children's lives. However it is not Government policy to prevent same-sex couples or single women having access to assisted reproduction clinics. These groups are already able to receive infertility treatment, so the Bill proposes a change that will bring the letter of the law in line with what is already happening in practice. The new legislation will therefore require clinics to take account of the child's need for supportive parenting.

These are obviously issues which many Christians feel strongly about. In drawing up this legislation, the Government has tried to find the right balance between allowing vital medical research to go ahead, and ensuring that the public can have confidence that legitimate embryo research activities are subject to robust controls and oversight.



Action on climate change

In November 2007, Labour introduced the Climate Change Bill to Parliament. It includes ambitious new targets and gives us new powers to take action. In December 2007, we also pushed for an international agreement to tackle climate change. Hilary Benn, Labour's Environment Secretary, said afterwards: “This is an historic breakthrough and a huge step forward. For the first time ever all the world's nations have agreed to negotiate on a deal to tackle dangerous climate change concluding in 2009.”

Government promotes inter-faith work

In December 2007, the Government launched its consultation document on inter-faith work. At the launch, Hazel Blears, the Communities Secretary, spoke of the Prime Minister's vision for an inter-faith council in every community, and expressed her own enthusiasm for helping faith communities to make a positive contribution to Britain. Parmjit Dhanda, the Government minister who co-chairs the Faith Communities Consultative Council, thanked members of the Council for their support of the consultation.

The Christian Socialist Movement

Alun Michael MP, CSM Chair, and Andrew Bradstock, CSM Director

The Christian Socialist Movement is a membership organisation offering mutual support, joint action and fellowship for people who are Christian by faith and radical in their political beliefs. We aim to provide a Christian witness within politics, especially in the Labour Movement, and to promote social justice and political engagement within the Christian community.

We are proud of our affiliation to the Labour Party and engage fully in its policy-making process. We have members in all the main denominations, with

some 50 MPs and peers and many local councillors and constituency officers. CSM organises the annual service at Party Conference and runs a high profile fringe programme.

CSM has a long and proud tradition. Today we continue to uphold the core values of Christian Socialism and seek to put them into practice in the world of politics. www.thecsm.org.uk



Having faith: working to cut re-offending rates



The Government has been examining the role that faith-based organisations can play in reducing adult and youth re-offending. A consultation document, entitled “Believing We Can”, was published in November 2007 by the National Offender Management Service—which is part of the Ministry of Justice—and the Youth Justice Board. The results of the consultation will inform a new Government plan to reduce re-offending in the UK.

Faith groups already play an important role in working with offenders, and the Government believes that this work can be extremely effective. According to one study cited in the consultation document, “over 6,000 faith-based volunteers contribute 16,300 hours every four weeks within the prison estate”.

This takes many forms, including supporting the families of those convicted, helping to rehabilitate ex-offenders back into their communities, and providing mentoring and support. The purpose of this new consultation has been to explore the ways in which the

Government can strengthen its partnership with faith groups in this area.

“Believing We Can” cites several examples of the successful role which faith-based organisations play in working with offenders. For example, Prison Link—a project which is delivered by the United Evangelical Project in Birmingham—offers valuable support for prisoners, ex-offenders and their families. The document also mentions Pecan, a Christian group based in Peckham in London, whose “WorkOut” project aims to help ex-offenders into employment.

In the foreword to “Believing We Can”, David Hanson MP, a Minister at the Ministry of Justice, wrote: “The Government recognises and values the experience and resources that faith communities and organisations bring to building strong, active and safer communities”.

He added: “We want to overcome the challenges of working in partnership with faith-based organisations and increase their role in prevention and reducing re-offending”.

The Labour Government has already made significant progress in tackling crime. Over the last ten years, we have cut crime by a third. Labour policies such as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and Community Support Officers—which deliver millions of extra hours of visible street patrolling each year—are having a real impact.

But there is still more to do. That is why the Labour Government has conducted this consultation. We believe that, by working with faith groups and others, we can continue to make Britain a safer place to live.

We want to hear from you

More than ever before, the Labour Party is committed to listening to and learning from those of religious faith—including those in our churches. We realise that many of you cannot commit to supporting any particular political party. Even so, we are interested to hear what you have to say, and to help you to continue your valuable work across the country.

There are a few things you can do to help us in this work.

- 1. Tell your friends about this newsletter.** We want to be in dialogue with as many people of faith as possible. Encourage others to join our mailing list at www.labour.org.uk/faith.
- 2. Ask to display this newsletter in your church.** Ask your church leaders if they are willing for this newsletter to be displayed so that others in your church can read about what Labour is doing.
- 3. Tell us how we can help you.** Write to Stephen Timms MP (Vice Chair for Faith Groups), c/o The Labour Party, 39 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0HA. Alternatively, email stephen@stephentimms.org.uk.

To join the Labour Party visit www.labour.org.uk/join or telephone us on 08705 900 200.