***In Plain Sight*: Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Conference Report**

*In Plain Sight*, the first national Catholic conference to promote the domestic strategies in parishes and dioceses to counter Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking was held this week in London. Organised by Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) and members involved in delivering vital services the conference attracted over seventy participants and was sponsored and hosted by CCLA Investment Management Limited.

Many diocese and parishes are awake to the de-humanising impact of modern-day slavery and human trafficking in England and Wales.  Leadership from our bishops and action from many religious congregations and Catholic charities has enabled the Catholic church to play its part in beginning to eradicate in the UK one of the world’s most organised, profitable and criminal activities that causes so much misery and long-term damage to its victims.

The conference was designed to equip delegates through shared practical experience and planning to combat Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking at a diocesan-parish level.  A session on supply chains helped diocese to appreciate the need for organisations to operate ethically in their procurement.

Peter Hugh Smith, Chief Executive of CCLA focused his welcome and introduction on the mission of CCLA as “good investment” not just as a financial mission but as a social justice commitment to supporting organisations to develop positive approaches to managing their resources and supply chains. CCLA hopes to act as a catalyst to investing ethically and humanely in people and recognise the difference they can make to eradicate modern day slavery.

The first independent government commissioner Kevin Hyland, now Senior Advisor to the Santa Marta group of the Bishops Conference of England and Wales, spoke of the 150 million children today in positions of exploitation many of them Integrated into business models and where many displaced people are the market for this trade. It’s estimated that 20,000 children die every year though slavery yet little if any action is taken against organisations that exploit children. Globally 99.98% of human trafficking goes without criminal prosecution so why wouldn’t a criminal do it if they will get away with it? Kevin concluded with, “The Santa Marta group is developing strategies to reset the moral compass within the Church to make sure we are not complicit by indifference to this massive global crime. It’s events like today that will help make this change from words into action.”

Inputs included Santa Marta, Local parish initiatives from Caritas Salford and National perspectives and victim support from The Medaille Trust, Caritas Westminster’s Bakhita House, plus women@thewell.  Andrew Adams (CCLA Ethical & Responsible Investment Team) & Sion Hall (formerly Head of the East Lancashire Police Anti - Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery addressed the issue of supply chains & ethical investment. Dr Anna Rowlands, St Hilda Associate Professor of Catholic Social Thought & Practice will prepare a follow-up paper on Modern Day Slavery and Catholic social thought.

Anthony Brown spoke of parish initiatives and involvement and how the resources within a parish when harnessed in partnerships can lead to awareness raising through local press and radio, prayer cards for parishes as well as networking with the police and their anti-trafficking units.

Beatrice Grasso, Detention Outreach Manager for the Jesuit Refugee Service UK described the supporting work of JRS in detention centres. These centres are not part of the criminal justice system, but detention centres look and operate like prisons even if those in detention have not committed any crime but have sought asylum in this country. Therefore, they are not places that aid recovery from the trauma of slavery and trafficking. The main role of JRS is to accompany people and stand in solidarity with them in detention. There is no statutory time limit for a person in detention and the UK is the only country to have no time limit to detain a person. There were 24,200 in detention last year. Many people who have been trafficked are eventually released but often back into the hands of their handlers in the trafficking and slavery world they came from. We need to build trust within a holistic approach of partnerships if we are to address the support need of the victims of human trafficking.

Karen Anstiss shared the work of Caritas Bakhita House. Twenty-two religious congregations led to over seventy volunteers with many relevant skills including languages and therapy skills. In common is the non- judgemental approach they all share. “Don’t judge, don’t promise and believe the unbelievable” are the bywords that Bakhita House operate by.

Marc Pearson, the Community Engagement Coordinator and Zoe Smith, Director of Communications and Advocacy spoke of the work the Medaille Trust. The Look Up project is a six-year partnership between the Medaille Trust and the Archdiocese of Birmingham to raise awareness in every parish of the Archdiocese. “The take up by the Archbishop himself has been a wonderful blessing to the project,” said Zoe who added, “There is always hope for victims of modern-day slavery who can have a fulfilling life after slavery.”

Caro Hattersley from women@thewell shared stories of women exploited in the sex trade who managed to tell their stories of brutality in brothels and escape to the security and recovery supported by the charity. “Consent cannot be purchased,” she said and, “decriminalising women caught up in forced exploitation is an important way forward to address the wider issues of modern-day slavery.”

Sion Hall, formerly the lead in the Lancashire Police Anti-Trafficking Unit reminded the conference that there are 140,000 people at any one time caught up in trafficking and modern-day slavery in the UK. The business model of supply and demand means that organised crime is the driving force behind forced labour and prostitution. He said, “Partnership between statutory services, police, NHS, probation, prison services, NGO’s and voluntary organisations is the way forward in tackling slavery. Public awareness is the starting point for preventative work.”

Andrew Adams from CCLA gave an investor’s perspective on modern slavery and the supply chains to which investors need to be sensitive. The everyday products that are part of our everyday lives means that practically everything we purchase has a direct or indirect connection to slavery. He said, “CCLA will be working with other investors to develop strategies to help companies keep their supply chains clean.”

Luke de Pulford of the Arise Foundation brought the conference to its conclusion by asking questions about the obstacles to collaboration and partnership working that included building trust rarely fits into measured outcomes but is vital to address the problem of slavery. In a hard-hitting assessment of the barriers he had experienced in this fields, he named money, ego and institutional self-interest. Leading the plenary session, he gathered the key points fedback from the focus groups which will form the basis of a new strategic plan. The message that came through was that we all needed to collaborate and work together, sharing resources and where necessary sharing the platforms that individual charities had occupied to pioneer their work.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols thanked the organisers for the conference: Caritas Salford, CSAN and CCLA for bringing together so many charities and organisations committed to the fight against human trafficking. He said, “We need a detailed public account of the good work of the Catholic Church in this field” and that “Difference properly used creates harmony” and the “Agencies engaged in anti-trafficking needs some clear and shared objectives.” He concluded by saying that the work of this conference was opening the door to the next phase.

Using the *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking* developed by the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the conference agreed the key effective action that the Church can adopt to contribute to the eradication of this growing problem. Summing up the day, Philip McCarthy CEO of CSAN said Partnership, Presence, Hope, Trust and Encounter are the words that have resonated throughout the conference.

Mark Wiggin

Director: Caritas Salford