

Catholic Anti-Slavery Forum Meeting: 22 February 2022

In attendance via zoom meeting:

Cardinal Vincent Nichols

Bishop Kenny (Episcopal Liaison to the National Board of Catholic Women)

Lynda Dearlove (Women from the Well) Chair

Kevin Hyland (formerly Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner) Chair

Luke de Pulford (Director of Arise) Forum Secretariat

Jaya Pathak (Arise and Forum administrator)

David Ryall (CBCEW)

Raymond Friel (CSAN)

Clive Chapman (CSAN)

Garry Smith (The Medaille Trust)

William Neal (JRS)

Martin Foley (Apostleship of the Sea)

Karen Anstiss (Carias Bakhita House)

Anthony Brown (Caritas Diocese of Salford)

Carol Hill (Catholic Care, Diocese of Leeds)

Sian Thomas (Caritas Diocese of Brentwood)

Abi Martin (St Chads Sanctuary)

Bridgetta Rooney (Sisters of St Joseph of Peace)

Muaricio Silva (Columbian Missionaries)

Jim Hannigan

Hannah (Volunteer)

Purpose of the Forum

The Catholic Anti-Slavery Forum exists to provide a meeting space within which Catholic organisations working to address exploitation can meet, share ideas and be briefed on issues of common concern. It does not seek to be a representative body and will not have its own legal or charitable personality. It is, in effect, a secretariat provided for the common benefit of these organisations. The common hope is that the Forum will help to create the conditions for increased collaboration between Catholic groups working in this space to the benefit of those who have suffered, or are at risk of, exploitation. For the time being, Arise has agreed to facilitate this service, but the initiative belongs to, and will be shaped by, the membership. To that end, the agenda for meetings will be decided upon by members and led by consensus.

Cardinal Nichols Introduction

In welcoming people to the meeting, and stressing the importance of working together, Cardinal Nichols said that the problem was getting worse instead of better. "In this long struggle against modern slavery we are probably losing rather than winning, because just as the situation of so many people around the world worsens, so the supply chain of people for the traffickers grows."

With the purpose of the Forum expressed as above, Kevin Hyland emphasized that it's not about reinventing something it's about getting that support and that hope [that are essential to progress].

National Referral Mechanism

Major concerns were raised about the National Referral Mechanism and the slow speed of reaching a decision. We heard that the average wait from a Reasonable Ground Decision to a final decision was 295 days. The Medaille reported an example of someone who had so far spent three Christmases in a Medaille safe house. (Yesterday morning the Pan Lancashire Anti-Slavery Partnership corrected the figure and said it was actually much worse at 400 days.) There are international obligations we are not heeding.

Nationality and Borders Bill

The Human Trafficking Foundation attended seven meetings at Parliament and it seems there is little likelihood there will be much change.

[After Exploitation](#) have drafted a very good letter asking MPs to remove Section 5 (a cluster of measures, restricting support for survivors of trafficking). Organisations and individuals are encouraged to respond using the letter.

JRS UK and SVP put out a briefing to Catholic peers on 23 October, focusing on clause 11 (e.g. late disclosure and how travel to UK) and asked CSAN to put out to as many Catholic organisations as possible.

A possible area for change is offshore processing which [Detention Action](#) are focusing on and is a potential winnable area.

Parts of the Bill run contrary to the Council of Europe and the ECHR

A current strategy is to focus on amendments in the Lords even though it is likely anything will be overruled in the Commons.

Supply chains and amendments to the Modern Slavery Bill

I referred to the Salford Diocese Modern Slavery Statement emphasizing that a strength of our statement compared with others is the very real policy/procedures put in place to ensure the Statement has teeth. Also, In contrast to other statements, ours recognized the personal complicity of, and need for action from, the entirety of the Catholic population, therefore going beyond good practice at organizational level. In the context of subsequent discussion, the publication of our Statement seems timely.

There are amendments to the 2015 Modern Slavery Bill and a 2nd reading in the Lords fairly soon aims to hold businesses to account on certain aspects of transparency. There is cross party willingness to support the amendments. Luke mentioned a special briefing for those interested (so maybe Peter Fahy or Sion Hall?)

In addition there will be million pound fines for companies the Government does not believe is complying with the Modern Slavery Act

Cardinal Nichols proposed a Work theme on supply chains in our charities and referred to a European meeting which majored on our churches' and Catholic charities' supply chains

Medaille Trust update

Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) is going well working with police forces. Medaille staff are part of victim rescue operations and work with the Police interviewing victims who are generally wary of authority. (Lancashire Police are part of this initiative)

The Moving on Project is a Medaille/Snowdrop project supporting female victims of human trafficking working in a number of areas including Manchester. They are looking for more partners but offers of involvement need to come with some supportive funding.

Progress & communications matters

I raised this with Luke de Pulford prior to the meeting and he put on the agenda. I said that it was now over two years since the October 2019 In Plain Sight Conference (organised by Caritas Diocese of Salford through CSAN) and we still did not have the Declaration for partnership working, and the majority of people attending the 2019 Conference had heard nothing since the summary notes put out shortly afterwards. The response was:

After a number of requests for change, they had been waiting for Bishop William Kenny and the Declaration would hopefully be agreed at the next meeting in three months' time. Bishop Kenny said he looked forward to seeing the latest draft.

All who attended the 2019 Conference and many others had been invited to all three meetings of the Forum, and with a reminder for each they had received six invitations. (I will check with my other diocesan links but this morning I spoke to one of the speakers at the 2019 Conference who had heard nothing except via myself. I will get back to Arise on this because it is important that as many Catholic organisations as possible subscribe to partnership working)

Future meetings and Working Groups

Jaya (Arise) has offered to coordinate working groups. In that context a closing statement from Women from the Well included the term "synodal" and represented well the spirit in which this group aims to work: "this is the Catholic response so encourage us to be more forward in expressing how we become a synodal church, listening to each other, but also listening to the needs on the ground, to create a more effective response."

A suggestion of providing notes of meetings, people's contact details, and papers in advance for easy discussion, was taken up.

Anthony Brown

24 February 2022