

Review of the year 2013: policy and advocacy



“CSAN through listening to agencies and thorough research has become a courageously out-spoken voice for the Church on matters of public policy, monitoring and critically commenting on proposed legislation and budgets, a good example of the Church’s light shining brighter than it has in the past in terms of the public debate.”

Rt Hon John Battle KC*SG

October 2013

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“We have ways of acting: one is through the voice of CSAN which has regular contacts with MPs and key Ministers – that is a pathway that we use all the time.”

Archbishop Vincent Nichols, November 2013

A strong Catholic voice on UK poverty

Our policy and advocacy work in 2013 was once again dominated by the soaring levels of domestic poverty that are facing our member charities every day. Throughout the year we have drawn together their experiences in order to inform decision makers in Westminster and Whitehall about the human impact of changes to the welfare system and to address legislation that risks making life harder for the UK's poorest people.

In addition to ensuring that the voices of Catholic charities and their service users were consistently raised in Parliamentary debates, we provided the opportunity for those working supporting families affected by in-work poverty to directly raise their concerns with both the Minister of State for Employment and Shadow Minister of State for Employment at our national conference *the Catholic Response to the Poverty Crisis*.

“The Caritas Social Action Network recently projected that in more than 20,000 households across London whole families are now sharing a single room, with potentially serious implications for their well-being. Beyond the immediate human impact, it is a concern that there has been little or no official analysis of the costs that will be incurred by the public services as a result of this.”

***Rt Hon Lord Touhig
House of Lords
October 2013***

“In an open letter this morning, the chief executives of Catholic charities in Liverpool, Manchester and London warned of the threat the Bill ‘poses to the fundamental well-being of disabled, unemployed and low paid people, as well as their families who are already buckling under the weight of recent changes to the welfare system.’ ”

***Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Shadow Minister of State for
Employment
House of Commons
January 2013***

We have also highlighted the economic costs of poverty in an appeal to the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee which involved more than thirteen Catholic charities and received national media coverage. Other key areas of work have included a detailed response to the government's proposals for changing child poverty measures and joint campaigning with other charities and faith groups around the availability of Free School Meals.

As a practical action to tackle in-work poverty we have been supporting the roll-out of the Living Wage within the Church. The Bishops' Conference Sectarial and key agencies have now been accredited as Living Wage Employers and work is

well underway to support other Church employers in doing so.

During the year our advocacy team has given briefings and presentations about UK poverty to a number of Catholic charities and grassroots groups, including keynote speeches at regional assemblies of the Justice and Peace Network and the National Board of Catholic Women.

“Reforms to the benefits system will increase rather than cut welfare costs, a group of 13 leading Catholic charities has told the Commons Public Accounts Committee.”

The Times, August 2013

A strong Catholic voice on migration, asylum and trafficking

One of our most prominent successes in 2013 involved a high-profile campaign to protect legal aid for victims of human trafficking and migrants experiencing domestic abuse. CSAN played a key role in securing significant concessions from the Ministry of Justice, exempting victims from a new residency test which would have deprived them of access to free legal advice and representation.

We have also undertaken significant work around the Immigration Bill, highlighting the potential harm that new restrictions on housing and NHS healthcare may cause to some of the most vulnerable people including those who have been victims of violence, trafficking or Female Genital Mutilation.

“I met yesterday with representatives of Caritas Social Action Network...they have genuine concerns that trafficked women and children...will be difficult to identify in practice.”

**Helen Jones MP
Shadow Minister of State for
Home Affairs
House of Commons
November 2013**

Other parliamentary activities included work

with Peers in the House of Lords to raise the issue of excessive employment restrictions on asylum seekers and the detrimental effect on integration. All of our advocacy in this area includes close co-operation with the Bishop for Migration and the Catholic Bishops' Conference Office of Migration Policy as well as our member charities working in the field.

Looking ahead to 2014 we have begun laying the groundwork for the Church's input into the Modern Slavery Bill, to strengthen provisions for tackling human trafficking.

“Commenting on the proposals, a spokesman for the social arm of the church, Caritas Social Action Network, said in a Statement: ‘withdrawing legal aid in such cases would amount to a denial of access to justice for those in greatest need of legal support.’ ”

**Channel 4 News
May 2013**

A strong Catholic voice on criminal justice

Alongside the development of CSAN's new Criminal Justice Forum we have carried out extensive advocacy around the rights of victims, prisoners, ex-offenders, and their families.

Our submission to the Justice Select Committee inquiry into arrangements for women offenders focussed on the unsuitability of the custodial estate for mothers and was widely referenced in the committee's final report. Other work on prisons involved a public campaign opposing restrictions to legal aid for treatment cases and panel debates on the issue of prisoner voting involving the Shadow Minister of State for Justice and the former Minister of State for Prisons.

We have also supported amendments to the Crime and Courts Bill -concerning the impact of fines on struggling families, and the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill -concerning identification and support for dependents of people sent to prison.

“Regimes can also interfere with family relationships...for women whose children are involved with social services, they need to make contact in normal working hours rather than during evening association [See Evidence from Caritas Social Action Network]”

**House of Commons Justice
Select Committee Report on
Women Offenders, July 2013**

Supporting our Catholic charities

A central part of our work is the provision of political information, analysis and support to Catholic charities working on the front-line. Throughout the year we have regularly given briefings – both digitally and in person – to Chief Executives, staff, trustees and funders of

“I am proud to support CSAN in their fantastic work. There have been a great range of charities here today who provide crucial services ranging from employment support and welfare advice to protection for refugees and victims of human trafficking. The advice and support which they offer are more important than ever in the current climate, when Government cuts are leaving more and more people struggling to get by.

Events like today’s enable Parliamentarians to build vital links with the people who are out on the coal face experiencing the impact of the legislation we make here. These people are an invaluable source of experience and expertise and we can learn so much from them.”

*Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP
Host of the 2013 CSAN
Parliamentary Reception*

the charities in our network. In this way we help to ensure that organisations involved in Catholic social action are both aware of legislative changes that will affect their service users and are actively involved in formulating our response.

We have also given our members opportunities to share their experiences and views directly with decisions makers. At this year’s CSAN Parliamentary Reception representatives of more than twenty Catholic charities met with more than thirty-five Ministers, MPs and Peers. Throughout the afternoon a range of productive discussions took place and as in previous years members were able to organise useful follow-up initiatives including parliamentary visits to their projects.

More broadly we worked during the year to raise the profile of Catholic social action at the heart of UK politics, holding events at all three major party conferences, addressing the Catholic Legislators Network, and hosting prominent politicians at our forums and conferences.

Summary

Throughout 2013 the CSAN Advocacy Team has worked on six bills and draft bills; made submissions to three government consultations; worked with MPs and Peers on two topical parliamentary debates; made submissions to two parliamentary select committees; and given detailed responses to major government announcements including the Chancellor’s Budget Statement and Autumn Statement.

Working with the CSAN Communications and Media Team we have hosted six advocacy-based events for our member charities and other Catholics involved in social action; and have undertaken substantive media work on key issues, including ten live BBC Radio debates about the impact of changes to the benefit system on those living in poverty.

As circumstances have become harder for the poorest and most vulnerable people we have provided a consistently strong and influential Catholic response informed by both the Church’s social teaching and the experience of its charities.

“Catholic Social Teaching has also been manifested in a strong Church voice – through public advocacy; through the bishops; and through the work of CSAN. Because you are at the cutting edge and what you have to say is rooted in day to day practical experience.”

*Lord Alton
Keynote speaker at the 2013
CSAN conference: ‘The Catholic
Response to the Poverty Crisis’*