

GENERAL SYNOD

Durham Diocesan Synod Motion: **CHALLENGING SLAVERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

... to move on behalf of the Durham Diocesan Synod:

‘That this Synod:

- (a) acknowledge the leading role that Her Majesty’s Government has played internationally in challenging slavery; and
- (b) ask Her Majesty’s Government to introduce legislation to ensure proper provision for the ongoing support and protection of trafficked minors is enshrined in law.’

Summary

This motion emerged from Durham’s involvement in a national campaign to support a young man who had become the victim of child trafficking. As a result of the campaign, the young man spoke at Durham Diocesan Synod in 2018 and the motion was passed call on the Government to ensure trafficked minors are given the support and protection they needed.

Despite the time passed since 2018, Modern Slavery is still a pressing issue that affects Dioceses across the country. Since 2018 the National Referral Mechanism has seen an increase in referrals, and an increase in proportion of those referrals being for children (43.5% in 2021). This motion acknowledges the work that has been done by the UK to tackle Modern Slavery, and provides for consensus that the Government should be held to account in its responsibility to produce legislation that supports and protects trafficked minors.

Background

1. Origin of Motion

- In 2018, members of Durham Diocese were involved in a national campaign to support a young man, Stephen (not his real name) who had become the victim of trafficking as a child, moved from Vietnam to the UK to work on a cannabis farm. He was rescued but was then at risk of being deported back to Vietnam. As Stephen had since been fostered by Rev David Tomlinson, a vicar in Shildon, Durham Diocese and Bishop Paul became involved in petitioning the government to have him treated as a trafficked child, rather than an illegal immigrant. The petition, which garnered over 100,000 signatures with the support of the local MP and community pressure, was successful and Stephen was given leave to remain. As a result of the campaign, and Stephen sharing some of his story at Durham Diocese Synod, the motion was put forward to ask the Government to introduce legislation that would ensure trafficked minors were given proper protection as victims of crime.
- In 2018, the NRM received 6,993 referrals (National Crime Agency, *‘National Referral Mechanism Statistics- End of Year Summary 2018, 2018*). In 2021, the number of referrals has increased to 10,695, of which 43.5% were children (IASC, *‘Child Trafficking in the UK 2021: a snapshot’*, 2021). This motion is still a timely focus on an extremely important issue.

2. Church of England engagement with Modern Slavery:

- A recent report into human trafficking and modern slavery from The Evening Standard and The Independent states that churches "...in being the "eyes and ears" of identifying potential survivors and possible slavery, are key." The report goes on to make recommendations for improving communication of "what to look for and where to go for help", a template for which could be designed nationally but used locally (IASC, The Evening Standard, The Independent, *'Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery- 2018 Report'*, 2018).
- The Clewer Initiative, which enables Church of England dioceses and wider Church networks to develop strategies to detect modern slavery in their communities and help provide victim support and care, has done outstanding work in raising awareness of these issues in local churches around the UK. There is no doubt that many of our churches regularly come into contact with trafficked individuals who use Food Banks, youth programmes, Messy Churches, and numerous other community initiatives, as well as being members of our congregations. As we answer the call to "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound" (Isaiah 61:1) it is vital that our churches are equipped to identify those who are held captive, and to resource ourselves effectively to support those that are most vulnerable. The Clewer Initiative is a fantastic resource to churches.

Motion

1. Part A

- a) The first part of the motion draws our attention to the leading work that the UK has done to tackle Modern Slavery. In 2015, the Modern Slavery Act passed through Parliament, which better provided for both the prosecution of human traffickers, and for victim identification and support. It also created the role of an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to advise and scrutinise the Government in their approach to tackling Modern Slavery. Last year, as part of the UK Government's New Plan for Immigration, the Home Office introduced the Nationality and Borders Bill (Section 4, now Section 5 of which is about Modern Slavery) which is still moving through Parliament.

2. Part B

- b) The second part of the motion provides consensus that the Government should be held to account in it's responsibility to produce legislation that supports and protects trafficked minors. There is support in the UK for children who have been trafficked, however there are some challenges that a minor may face in accessing support.
 - In order to be identified as a victim of Modern Slavery, everyone must go through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) in which their case is investigated and a decision made. There have been concerns raised by many organisations including the Children's Society that if it became more difficult for children to navigate the NRM, or access it in the first place, this would be a barrier to protection and support.
 - One example is that children accessing the NRM will likely have experienced trauma, and may not be able to disclose the information

required for their decision within a time limit. This may be even more difficult for a young asylum seeker.

- Another example, is that there can be blurred lines between a child's identification as both a victim and perpetrator of crime if they've been subject to child criminal exploitation, for example by County Lines (The Children's Society, '*Counting Lives: Responding to children who are criminally exploited*', 2019). Restricting NRM access for those with longer custodial sentences would mean their claims would not be investigated, and accompanying support withheld. In the year 2020/21, 'child criminal exploitation' was the most common type of NRM referral (IASC, '*Child Trafficking in the UK 2021: a snapshot*', 2021).
- Once a child has received their decision and are formally identified as a victim of Modern Slavery, there is existing support and protection mechanisms for them in the UK. The Working Together To Safeguard Children Statutory Guidance 2018 is an example of this. However, the Government have not yet updated the guidance despite receiving calls from the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to do so (IASC, '*Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Annual Report 2020-2021*', 2021.). As a result, many local authorities have issued their own guidance. Organisations such as the Children's Society are supporting local authorities in their responses, but according to the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, many local authorities have reported feeling under resourced to provide an effective response to such an issue.
- It is vital that an effective system is in place which does not put barriers in place to trafficked minors receiving support and protection. Ensuring the Government is held to account so this is the case can be done with a range of legislative and non-legislative actions.

Ali Bianchi, General Synod Member, Durham

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