



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

ENGLAND AND WALES

Caritas Parliamentary Reception

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, WESTMINSTER, 23 NOVEMBER 2011

Address by Helen O'Brien, CEO, Caritas Social Action Network

Thank you all for coming to this exciting inaugural Parliamentary Reception for the members of Caritas Social Action Network. It is a great privilege to be able to facilitate such an event and we hope it will allow a positive and constructive dialogue to emerge between CSAN members and Parliamentarians. I would like to thank in particular, the Archbishop of Westminster for his active support of Caritas, Jon Cruddas MP for kindly hosting today's reception and for the work he does in support of social action, and all of the Parliamentarians for taking time to come and speak to our members and learn more about their exemplary work in our communities throughout England and Wales.

It is hoped that this event will prove to be a catalyst in developing a more open and active advocacy network between our members and those in Parliament who are working to address social issues. It will also assist in enabling CSAN to develop and offer our authentic and clear voice on social action concerns.

In terms of Caritas Social Action Network itself, we are embarking on a very exciting time in the organisation with a great sense of drive and optimism on where the network is going. This is particularly true in terms of strengthening links between members and creating an organisation which is visibly and publicly addressing issues of social disadvantage in our communities. As CSAN grows we hope that our members, and all who are linked with us, can be further strengthened by our commitment to supporting them in their work, and by acting as a united network against social disadvantage.

CSAN's current work on advocacy has proved to be successful in making links with those in positions of authority and providing a platform on which social issues can be addressed. Our recent work concerning the Welfare Reform Bill is evidence of this and especially of our developing relationship with the House of Lords. Indeed, later today the Lords will be discussing and amendment tabled by Baroness Hollins with which our members have been actively engaged.

Meetings that CSAN has had with civil servants and our representation at All Party Parliamentary Groups, have been central to engaging directly with domestic injustices and with those who can address these issues in legislation and in wider public policy. The All Party group meetings that we have attended include those on Poverty, Disability, Adoption and Fostering, Learning Difficulties, and HIV/AIDS. These are central domestic issues for many of CSAN's members. It is wonderful to see that many of the MPs and Peers, who work as part of these Parliamentary groups, are here today to discuss these issues with those working in the field.

The benefits of this gathering will, I'm sure, be felt ultimately by those who are the most vulnerable in our society.