



Companies should do more to protect vulnerable workers as the London Olympics approach

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Both the global economic downturn and the pending London Olympic year bring issues around the exploitation of vulnerable workers into sharp focus in the UK. The wide-ranging nature of this exploitation and the opportunities for large companies to do more to prevent it were discussed by five expert speakers in front of an audience of about 130 people at a public panel debate organised by the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) at Friends House in London on 17 November.

Entitled 'Vulnerable Workers, Trafficking, Pornography and the Economics of Exploitation: London 2012 and beyond', the debate was chaired by Victoria Heath, an ECCR Board member and Head of Business Development at EIRIS.

Panellists Dr Stella Creasy MP, Catherine Howarth of FairPensions, D.I. Kevin Hyland of the Metropolitan Police Trafficking and Prostitution Unit, Dr Sasha Rakoff of OBJECT, and Bill Seddon of the Church Investors Group and Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church addressed a wide range of issues affecting vulnerable workers across many of the key Olympic sectors.

In the ongoing context of financial crisis, speakers highlighted the need not just for the minimum wage but for a living wage. Many workers in the construction, catering and hotel industries, among others, are currently paid well below living wage level. Shareholder pressure is needed to encourage more FTSE100 companies to apply the living wage across their whole UK operation.

Human trafficking is a significant problem in the UK with many victims forced to work in appalling conditions, for example in the building trade and in the sex industry. Church investors are engaging with major UK hotel chains to encourage them to do more to prevent their premises being used by traffickers, particularly during the London Olympics, following similar work by faith-based investors in the US around major sporting events.

Hotels, sex trafficking and London 2012, a briefing paper researched by ECCR and commissioned by CCLA, published in the same week as the debate, was made available to all who attended. The paper shows the role that ethical investors can play in addressing this issue in advance of London 2012.

The engagement of ethical investors with companies across the whole range of issues highlighted in the panel debate is vital; for as Catherine Howarth said in her presentation "where ethical investors lead, the mainstream follows their pioneering work".

Notes for editors

Contacts at ECCR:

Helen Boothroyd, Church and Membership Relations Officer: 07503 931172;

helen.boothroyd@eccr.org.uk

Suzanne Ismail, Researcher: 020 7663 1055; suzannei@quaker.org.uk

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The Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility ([ECCR](#)) is a church-based investor coalition and membership organisation working for economic justice, human rights and environmental sustainability. ECCR is a registered charity (No. 1139618), a company limited by guarantee in England & Wales (No. 2764183) and a Body in Association with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

[EIRIS](#) is a leading global provider of independent research into the environmental, social, governance (ESG) and ethical performance of companies. EIRIS extra-financial research is used by investors around the world for ESG risk management, ethical screening and sustainable investment strategies

[FairPensions](#) campaigns for major institutional investors to adopt responsible investment, using shareholder power to hold companies to account.

[OBJECT](#) campaigns and lobbies on 'sex object culture', challenging the sexual objectification of women.

The [Church Investors Group](#) (CIG) is a group of investors connected with the Churches of Britain and Ireland with combined assets of about £12.6 billion, which believes that their investment portfolios should reflect the moral stance and teachings of the Christian faith.

The [Living Wage](#) is defined as the minimum hourly wage necessary for housing, food and other basic needs for an individual and their family. Living Wage rates take account of real living costs for essential goods and services. Within London, the Living Wage figure is currently £8.30 per hour; outside London it is £7.20 per hour. Accredited Living Wage employers ensure all their own staff and those of their on-site contractors are paid at least the Living Wage across all UK operations.

[CCLA Investment Management](#) provides specialist investment management for charities, faith organisations, and local authorities and manages the widest range of ethical funds for charities.