

## **ECCR open debate 2011**

### **Vulnerable Workers, Trafficking, Pornography and the Economics of Exploitation: London 2012 and beyond**

ECCR's 2011 Open Debate took place on 17 November at Friends House, London. Chaired by Victoria Heath, Head of Business Development at EIRIS and ECCR Board member, the panel featured speakers Dr Stella Creasy MP, Catherine Howarth of FairPensions, DI Kevin Hyland of the Metropolitan Police Trafficking and Prostitution Unit, Dr Sasha Rakoff of OBJECT and Bill Seddon of the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church. It was attended by more than 120 people.

The debate highlighted the wide range of issues around economic exploitation and vulnerable workers facing the key sectors and sponsors associated with the Olympics 2012, identifying this major sporting event as an important opportunity for FTSE listed companies to put in place robust policies and practices to combat exploitation and protect these workers.

#### **Catherine Howarth: The campaign for a living wage**

Catherine Howarth highlighted the longstanding nature of the Living Wage Campaign, started by London Citizens. The living wage rate is currently £8.30/hour in London and £7.20/hour elsewhere.

FairPensions, which campaigns for responsible investment, is encouraging shareholder activism in support of the living wage, training people to ask questions at company AGMs. Ethical investors are leading the way, but the hope is also to influence the mainstream to take up the issue. The drive for financial returns need not be an amoral search for profits at the expense of human rights.

FairPensions is working with FTSE 100 companies, asking them to operate the living wage across their whole UK operation, including not just employees but also contracted staff such as cleaners and caterers.

London Citizens engaged with Sebastian Coe before the UK even won the Olympics 2012 and the Organising Committee did make an early commitment to the living wage. However, a number of the sponsors are not yet living wage companies so further pressure is needed.

#### **DI Kevin Hyland: Combating human trafficking**

Kevin Hyland began by focusing on sex trafficking. An estimated 1 million young women are sold worldwide for sex every year. The Metropolitan Police have had recent success in jailing sex trafficking gangs.

Many people are also trafficked for other forms of exploitation including: forced labour, in both legal and illegal trades; domestic servitude; slavery, which does not need to involve international trafficking; and 'exploitation as a commodity', referring to vulnerable people forced into illegal activity such as benefit fraud or shoplifting.

The Metropolitan Police take a victim-centred approach, working in partnership with charities trusted by victims. Christian agencies are prominent in this work including Medaille Trust, Women at the Well, Rahab, Caritas, the Catholic Bishops Conference and the Salvation Army.

The police are asking newspaper publishing companies to stop accepting advertisements for the sale of sexual services. A number of publishers have already ended these advertisements. Other companies can encourage reluctant publishers to take this step by withdrawing their own advertising until they do so.

### **Dr Sasha Rakoff: Challenging the objectification of women**

Sasha Rakoff explained that OBJECT has had some success with regard to legislative change concerning the licensing status of lap-dancing clubs and the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services from anyone trafficked or forced.

Prior to the recession there was an exponential expansion in the sex industry, she thinks due both to lack of regulation and a prevailing cultural climate, driven by media and advertising, which normalises the idea of girls and women as a product and profoundly influences the views and life choices of the young.

Companies need to change their policies. Most supermarkets and other magazine retailers now adhere to the voluntary code regarding the placement of pornography on top shelves and covered, but there are still notable exceptions. Pornography sites on the internet have become increasingly violent and abusive. Children are exposed to this material.

The availability of pornography needs to be tackled by businesses and shareholders as well as government regulation. Now is the time for ethical investors to lead the way on these concerns.

### **Dr Stella Creasy MP: Working in partnership; finding solutions**

Stella Creasy paid tribute to the work of the Living Wage Campaign and of the Metropolitan Police on trafficking. Both have made a major difference in her Walthamstow constituency, an 'Olympic borough'. It is easy to identify problems, but what are exemplified in this work are solutions, using both specialist knowledge and partnership.

It is very heartening that many of those working in Olympic-related jobs are now being paid the living wage. Shareholder challenges to companies have been significant in bringing change. The work of faith-based investors with the hotel industry is important for the Olympic boroughs.

There is a danger of trafficking and prostitution falling off the political agenda. These issues are not included in the government strategy to end violence against women and specialist support services are being cut.

The problem of legal loan sharking has risen in the current economic climate. Legislation is needed to cap interest rates. It is also important to put pressure on the companies involved through the venture capital firms that underpin them and to encourage the banks to make their services more readily available to financially excluded people.

## **Bill Seddon: Church investors engaging for change**

Human trafficking first came to Bill Seddon's attention through work by US faith-based investors around the 2010 World Cup who contacted international hotel groups to see how well prepared they were to prevent their premises being used for activities linked to trafficking. The responses indicated that the sector had considerable room for improvement. The strategy of linking the trafficking issue to major sporting events is helpful and the 2012 Olympics provides UK investors with the ideal hook on which to hang a similar effort.

The Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church (CFB) seeks to provide good financial returns within a Christian ethical framework through engagement with the companies in which it invests to encourage the steady improvement of business practices.

CFB and others in the Church Investors Group (CIG) have increased engagement with the two FTSE 100 hotel groups: IHG, best known for Holiday Inns, and Whitbread, which owns Premier. As recently as August Whitbread stated that trafficking was "not an issue" for them. However, since the ECCR briefing paper was first drafted there has been significant movement. The International Tourism Partnership, of which these companies are members, released a statement on tackling human trafficking. CIG has arranged engagement meetings with both companies in December. This seems an issue that has risen rapidly up the level of corporate consciousness.

CFB is finalising an investment guidance policy on pornography to complement and enhance its existing policy on the media. Other CIG members are doing similarly.

Bill Seddon ended with a comment based on Micah 6:8, heard on a recent retreat: "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it".

## **Questions and discussion**

*Experience from other Olympics shows increased demand for sexual services; Salvation Army workers are being told by prostitutes they work with "see you next April".*

Stella Creasy (SC): It is important that there are exit strategies for women to get out of prostitution if they wish.

Sasha Rakoff (SR): Three quarters of prostitutes cite poverty as the reason they got into prostitution.

*When is the deadline for publishers to stop taking advertisements for prostitution? What about the demand side? If the demand was not there children would not be so likely to get into prostitution.*

Kevin Hyland (KH): The Metropolitan Police encouraged publishers to act within a year, but this is not mandatory. Ireland recently brought in legislation making newspaper advertisement of prostitution illegal. Businesses should refuse to advertise in newspapers that continue to carry such advertisements and individuals stop buying them.

SR: In Sweden where demand has been targeted by criminalising the buyer of prostitution rather than the seller there has been a 50% reduction in child prostitution. These measures were combined with advisory services designed to help prostitutes exit the industry.

SC: The Mayor of London has power over advertising on the tube. We should raise concerns with him about unacceptable advertising, including by legal loan sharks.

*The UK Hindu Forum notes that Hindus are not much engaged on these issues. Are there things that religious organisations should be doing differently to be part of the dialogue in a more productive way?*

Bill Seddon (BS): The Methodist Church has shared information internally and with other church structures. It seems as if Bishops in the House of Lords lobbying government ministers has had some useful effect. But the churches have not yet been sufficiently vocal around pornography. Distribution of pornography over mobile phones is a growing issue in which churches might be able to use their voice more effectively. It is worth pushing religious organisations to take action.

*We need to start by looking at women's poverty. The English Collective of Prostitutes believes the overwhelming reasons women go into prostitution are poverty and debt. Trafficking is used as an excuse to target women acting collectively for their own protection. Women in the sex industry need a voice. The Church should press for decriminalisation and support prostitutes in court.*

KH: It is a myth that trafficking is not an issue. Women frequently testify to the contrary. It is right that the law does all it can to protect them.

SC: It is right to focus on poverty. Women's poverty is increasing. There is a need to protect the minimum wage and fight for reduced unemployment, the living wage and continuing legal aid for immigrant women facing violence.

*What can be done about the problem of bogus self employment – where employers get around paying the minimum wage by claiming that workers are self employed and give them far more work than can be done in the time paid?*

Catherine Howarth (CH): A larger inspectorate is needed to prevent employers taking crafty ways around legislation. The minimum wage is inadequate and a living wage is needed.

SC: The rates charged by loan sharks cut severely into low wages. Yet the government's review on employment rights is headed by a venture capitalist funding legal loan sharks. People can help by signing the e-petition on legal loan sharking. There are issues around the exploitation of interns and a need to identify and target companies that use zero hours contracts to avoid their obligation to workers.

*The churches should make an ethical and practical choice to include workers from the sex industry in the debate to solve the problems around it. Some of the measures panel members propose would make sex workers less safe. Should the UK decriminalise the sex industry?*

KH: The Burn Report suggested there needs to be a debate about decriminalisation of the sex industry. But trafficking is a serious issue. 3-4000 people a year are trafficked for forced labour; 2-3000 people for sexual exploitation.

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