

## **Archbishop Vincent Nichols Address to CSAN Parliamentary Reception – 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012**

Good afternoon; it is a pleasure to be back in Parliament for the second annual Caritas Social Action Network reception. I am delighted once again to see so many charities and parliamentarians gathered here for this very special event.

As you know, CSAN has a significant role in fulfilling the social action mission of the Church, and its work bringing the voice and experience of Catholic charities to members of both Houses of Parliament is an essential dimension of this. The decisions that will be made in this building over the months ahead demonstrate the importance of this dialogue between those working on the front line to support the vulnerable, and those tasked with crafting legislation.

Perhaps one of the most important areas currently under consideration here is how we care for older and disabled people: a fundamental test of any civilised society. I applaud the efforts underway from many quarters to address shortcomings in the care system, and encourage all those involved in this urgent and vital process.

As in recent years, another significant challenge is how to tackle unemployment and in-work poverty during this period of economic hardship. Together we must strive to ensure that a safety net is always in place to protect essentials such as food and shelter for those who fall on hard times. And most critically we must work to prevent and mitigate the lifelong damage that is all too frequently the consequence of a childhood spent in acute family poverty.

We are also facing considerable questions around the delicate balance of punishment, rehabilitation and victim support in our criminal justice system. Ensuring that humanity and redemption remain at its core is a further priority for the Church and those carrying out its work in prisons and communities.

Against this backdrop, I warmly welcome today's gathering and urge everyone present to use the opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences. By working together we can further the Common Good, and support those individuals and families who are facing hardship and human suffering.

Of course, it is also important that we take this moment to celebrate the tremendous work of CSAN's member charities over the past year. Perhaps more than ever before, the context in which you are working demands that you do more with less; but you have risen to the challenge.

Every single day across England and Wales you provide shelter to the homeless, comfort the sick, care for victims including those affected by the horrors of human trafficking, and life affirming opportunity to those on the margins of society. Your actions are a living embodiment of Catholic Social Teaching which is itself a framework for how we live out the gospel in society, of how a society can best arrange itself, by placing the good of the human person at the heart of our concern.

I sincerely hope that our gathering helps to further this work and am grateful to all members of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords who have given up your time to show such support, not just today but throughout the year.

Thank you.

