

Faith & Policy Watch

April 2010

UN Commission on the Status for Women: Call to "intensify" commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action



“ 89% of carers are women.
 75% of childcare during the week and 66% at weekends is done by women.
 19% of our MPs are female.
 16.4% is the average pay gap between men and women working full-time in the UK.
 8.1% of directors of banks in the FTSE 100 are women.
 30,000 women lose their jobs every year because of pregnancy. ”
 Source: Daily Telegraph 9/3/2010

The 54th UN Commission on the Status of Women was different to many previous sessions. This year governments reviewed the 12 themes contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) (action plan to improve the lives of women) and progress that has been made, instead of just one or two themes. Rather than negotiating agreements, this year government representatives rubber stamped a political declaration that had been drawn up five days before the Commission started. The Declaration *reaffirms* the Beijing Declaration and PFA; *emphasises* its importance to achieving the Millennium Development Goals; and *calls upon* the UN, national governments, NGOs... everyone really, to 'intensify their contributions' to the Platform for Action.



Sarah Kasule speaking at a side event

At a Baha'i and Womens' National Commission side event, Sarah Kasule, Provincial Worker for Uganda, spoke passionately about how the media portrays women in Uganda and how even conventions of dress can impede women's involvement in journalism. She will continue to further Mothers' Union's work on gender and advocacy in Uganda. There were also other Mothers' Union members in attendance with the Anglican Communion – demonstrating just how important it is that Christians are involved in lobbying governments for justice.

With this call to action in mind, Mothers' Union is intensifying its efforts to further gender justice and is producing the *Beijing Action Pack after Easter*, for members in the UK and Rep. Ireland. For your copy, which includes *Beijing in Brief*; the *Grass-routes to Justice* leaflet; prayers, discussion starters and ideas on how to lobby; and 'I ♥ the Beijing PFA' stickers, contact Central services on 020 7222 5533 for hard copies; or policy@themothersunion.org for a copy via email.

Heavenly Father,
 we pray for all those who are suffering
 from poverty and gender inequality.
 Heal them with your power,
 and may we never cease to speak out
 against injustice in the world. Amen

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Guide to the UK General Election

Our most important task is to give our neighbour dignity in Christ. This is our spirituality and it walks hand in hand with our work. In this way we try to have one foot on earth and one foot in heaven; and we are still travelling. The General Election is our opportunity.



2010 is UK General Election year! Due to take place in May, many commentators are already speculating that there will be a Conservative Government or even a hung Parliament. Whatever the outcome, many MPs have already stated that they will be leaving Parliament either through retirement or resignation. Mothers' Union has produced a resource, *New Vision, New Future*, to help members reflect on the importance of government and democracy; to inform members of parties' policies; to provide practical information on different methods of voting and running a hustings; to offer some biblical reflections and prayers; and short questions for group discussions.

To download the resource, please go to Mothers' Union homepage at www.themothersunion.org For up-to-date predictions on the outcome of the Election, go to the Election Predict website, run by ComRes and Betfair at www.electionpredict.com



Citizens for Sanctuary

Mothers' Union is backing the *Citizens for Sanctuary Campaign*, which aims to secure justice for people fleeing persecution and to rebuild public support for sanctuary. The *Sanctuary Pledge* calls upon MPs and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates to campaign responsibly on asylum and support the end of child detention. Margaret Beringer, member of the Trustee Board, represented Mothers' Union at the high profile public launch on 25th March in Westminster. Following speeches and a moving account from a former child detainee, representatives attended Parliament to hand letters to senior Parliamentarians and commission *Sanctuary Books* to tour the UK – Margaret commissioned the book to be sent across Scotland. Go to <http://sanctuarypledge.org.uk/> If you would like to train as a Sanctuary Champion (to help lead the campaign in your area), please contact the Faith & Policy Unit on 020 7222 5533.

Over the years, Mothers' Union in **Coventry Diocese** has supported *Coventry Peace House*, a fully mutual housing co-operative that, amongst other things, offers hospitality to and campaigns for refugees and asylum seekers. The Peace House is also leading the call to make Coventry a *City of Sanctuary*, which is a movement to create a network of towns and cities throughout the country that offer a culture of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary in the UK.



The Budget UK

On 24th March, Chancellor Alistair Darling announced the last Budget of this Parliament.

Key announcements included:

- Inheritance tax frozen for next 4 years
- Stamp duty scrapped for homes below £250,000 for first-time buyer; and stamp duty on residential property sales over £1m to increase to 5%
- £2.5bn support for small business to boost skills and innovation; and investment allowance for small firms doubled to £100,000
- 1 million extra people guaranteed basic bank account
- Annual ISA limit to rise from £7,200 to £10,200 from next month
- Child tax credit to increase by £4 per week for parents of 1 and 2 year olds from 2012
- Amount of time over-65s have to work to receive work credits reduced
- 6 month work or training guarantee for under-24s extended to 2012
- The pensioners' higher winter fuel payment of £250 and £400 for the over-80, guaranteed for another year
- 3p increase on fuel between April 2010 and January 2011.

Easter Reflection

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he had died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" Mark 15: 38-39



It is intriguing that the brief mention of the Temple curtain's tearing at the moment of Christ's death in the Synoptic Gospels is interpreted by many scholars to have transformed the entire Old Testament concept of holiness. The tearing of one, quite literally, seamless curtain symbolised that access to the holy presence of God through Jesus was now available to everyone.

Very few people knew where this curtain hung; its precise and inaccessible location was known only to the High Priest as it separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place and the rest of the Temple. Exodus 26:31-35 recounts the dimensions and making of this curtain which had once covered the presence of the Ark of the Covenant from public view. The High Priest entered the Holy of Holies only once a year to pray and ask for the nation's sins to be forgiven. The tearing of this curtain would have been rendered meaningless unless its symbolic value represented something greater than its presence. In including this detail, the Gospel writers wanted to demonstrate that the unapproachable had now become approachable. It was a reversal of the divine encounters of Moses and Elijah, as they were asked to stand back and hide their faces, while now there was the permission for a more direct understanding and experience of holiness.

This was a very tall and very thick curtain as detailed in Exodus 26. We notice too, that it was torn from top to bottom rather than from the bottom upwards. This was not the work of human hands because that would have meant tearing it from the bottom. It was the work of God - it was torn from the top to symbolise that the tearing had been done from heaven to earth. God's presence was no longer confined to the Holy of Holies; he would never again dwell in a Temple made with hands. God had fulfilled everything he wanted to achieve with that Temple, its religious system and worship, and later the Temple and Jerusalem were left "desolate" in 70 AD, when they were destroyed by the Romans. Christ's coming brought the New Covenant that established a new relationship with all people, in all times and all places.

Jesus is risen. Alleluia! Alleluia! Happy Easter to every one of our readers.



National Family Week UK

The second National Family Week is running during the spring half-term, from 31st May to 6th June. During the week thousands of organisations will be running their own events and participating in the NFW themed days.

Monday: *Family Week Picnic*

Wednesday: *Family Week Story Time*

Friday: *Family Week House Party*

Tuesday: *Family Week Film Day*

Thursday: *Family Week Road Trip*

Saturday: *Family Week Sports Day*

We would love to hear about any NFW events you are running or participating in – please do let the Marketing Unit know on 020 7222 5533 or marketing@themothersunion.org For further details and ideas about the week, go to www.nationalfamilyweek.co.uk

European Council Directive on parental leave

The European Council of Ministers agreed last month to extend minimum parental leave to four months per parent. Parents will be allowed take four months each and transfer months between them - allowing one parent to take up to seven months off (at least one month cannot be transferred to the other parent). This applies to all workers, regardless of their contract type, and will require changes to national law in the UK and Rep. Ireland within two years, although they can decide whether it will be paid. Proposals to provide at least 18 weeks maternity leave on full pay across Europe have been delayed, as MEPs have raised concerns about costs - the debate has been postponed until May.



In a YouGov poll, almost a fifth of men said that they would take advantage of recent Government proposals to extend paternity leave to six months – this is higher than the 8-12% take up Government estimation.

Report: Sexualisation of Young People

An independent review into the sexualisation of young people, conducted by psychologist **Dr Linda Papadopoulos**, was published by the Home Office in February. The review forms part of the government's strategy to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) and finds that the increasing volume of sexualised imagery across the media is 'mainstreaming' pornography and influencing the development of children. The portrayal of women as sex objects and men as



'hyper-masculine and sexually dominant' is influencing children's ideas of gender roles and body image, and Papadopoulos highlights research that links the consumption of sexualised imagery to sexist attitudes, sexually aggressive behaviour, violence and bullying.

The report makes key recommendations that: schools and youth services educate young people about sexualisation, sexual bullying and violence; the media step up its role in protecting children from inappropriate content; Government work with businesses and retailers to encourage responsible retailing; and further research into sexualisation be carried out. To read the full report, go to:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/Sexualisation-of-young-people.html>

Report: Cost of relationship breakdown

The Relationships Foundation has updated its annual index on the cost of family breakdown in UK, in *Counting the cost of family failure*, which has risen to £41.7 billion. The research is based on costs to tax and benefits, housing, health and social care, criminal justice and education. The biggest impact of family breakdown is on health and social care – costing the NHS £11.18 billion a year – and the report notes that divorce affects men and women in terms of smoking, drinking and sexual risk taking. The Relationships Foundation argues that relationship education and support can help families stay together and reduce the cost of breakdown.

God, our Heavenly Father,
We thank you for the gift of relationships,
But we pray today for those who find themselves in situations where there is no easy answer.
Guide them in their decision making and show them the way forward,
So that in all things they feel your loving hands upon them.

Margaret Pullin, Carlisle