

Statement to Local Government and Transport Committee at Stage 1

27 October 2006

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland has followed with interest the political activity aimed at tackling the social problem of prostitution. We support the Executive in instigating detailed consideration of the problems which arise for the women drawn in to the dangerous world of prostitution and the damaging effects this also has on the wider community. We are greatly concerned at what we view as the abuse of women in what for many is a modern form of slavery in particular for those women trafficked and forced to work in prostitution. We are pleased to see the introduction of legislation aimed at tackling the problem.

In previous responses to proposals concerning prostitution, we pointed out, among other points:-

- the inherent dangers of prostitution
- the loss of dignity for women
- the need to tackle the root causes of prostitution
- the extent to which prostitutes are victims requiring support to enable them to move to a life of dignity

The Prostitution (Public Places) Scotland Bill sets out to curtail the extent of prostitution partly by penalising those who prey on them. It does this by "criminalising the nuisance caused by those seeking to purchase prostitution services". If this limited proposal and other measures proposed succeed in reducing street prostitution and prostitution in general, then they are to be welcomed.

We believe however that clarification is required as to the extent to which the bill goes. Our concern is that by restricting the offence only to cases of solicitation, the larger part of the kerb crawling problem may remain un-addressed. We recognise the difficulty of discerning how to balance the need to permit legitimate car use where actions can be misinterpreted with the need to eradicate the practice of kerb crawling. We believe it is necessary for the committee to explore this aspect of the bill.

There are a number of projects that the Catholic Church sponsors to counter the damage of prostitution and to support the victims of prostitution and we would be happy to provide expertise in any ongoing examination of the issue before the committee.