



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Office for Refugee Policy

12th September 2006

BISHOP PATRICK O'DONOGHUE VOICES CONCERN OVER HOMELESSNESS AMONG POLISH MIGRANTS

On Monday 11th September the Bishop of Lancaster, the Rt Rev Patrick O'Donoghue, Chairman of the Office for Refugee and Migration Policy of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, met a delegation from the Polish-British Mission for Employment led by Polish charity, the Barka Foundation, which was visiting London to find out at first hand about homelessness among Polish migrants. Representatives from homelessness charities, Housing Justice, the Passage, the Simon Community and the Upper Room, were also present at the meeting.

The following statement was issued after the meeting:

It is commendable that the UK government has allowed the right to free movement of workers from the Accession Eight countries. However it has not provided assistance or programmes to familiarise these workers with British life. As a consequence many fail and end up living in poverty and homelessness. The government cannot simply walk away from helping these people. At the very least it should, together with the Polish government, provide additional resources to homelessness charities and other NGOs that provide information, advice and support to these migrants.

Our economy and culture has benefited greatly from the free movement of workers in Europe, but all too often we have not supported these workers. It is with regret that we hear of an increasing number of migrant workers becoming homeless, sleeping rough and living in squalor and poverty, with no family or community support. This is particularly true with migrants who arrive outside the Worker Registration Scheme or as self-employed and cannot access welfare support when in difficulty.

“Much work is already being done by the Catholic Church in England and Wales working with and supporting the Polish Community,” Bishop Patrick told the delegation. “Since the Second World War, the Polish Community has made an amazing contribution to the enrichment of our Church life. There are more than 100 Polish priests working in parishes and Polish Centres up and down the country and a significant number of Catholic Churches have opened their doors for Mass, Sacramental care and the establishment of community life. Much of this has been facilitated by the office of the Vicar Delegate for Poles in England and Wales. There is always more to be done and I ask parishes to allow the use of halls so that migrants can meet with one another, deepen fellowship and find a place that they can call home. They also need our support for better employment and human rights. I must also add that in our interdependent world of migration, we must not forget the presence of migrants from other parts of Europe and



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the global south, many of whom are in an irregular situation. The status and well being of these migrants also deserves our attention.”

I recall the statement made by Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop Kevin McDonald and Bishop Thomas McMahon on 1st May 2006 the day for St Joseph the Worker:

“Increasingly the congregation of our major cities are made up of migrant workers, people whose precarious living standards often impose terrible burdens on their families. People whom we stand alongside in the pews need us to stand alongside their need for justice and charity.”

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Photos available on request

Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue with Tomasz Sadowski from the Barka Foundation

Notes to Editors

Increasing numbers of migrant workers from the new EU member states could find themselves on the streets this winter, unless the government takes swift action. Homelessness charities cannot cope because hostels for homeless are state funded and cannot take these people. Many migrant workers have found secure and well paid jobs but according to reports from homelessness charities increasing numbers especially those who arrive outside the Worker Registration Scheme are falling victim to exploitative employers who ignore the minimum wage rates, tax and insurance contributions and basic health and safety rules. Many are living in squalor and poverty.