

# **Building a New Culture of Social Responsibility**

*6 April 2011*

Catholic Social Action Conference

Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Westminster

## **Baroness Warsi**

**Cabinet Member and Chairman of the Conservative Party**

It is a great honour to be here today, to be a part of something very special: A conference on “social responsibility”.

In line with your tradition, you have listened and considered together. You have taken time to identify and explore the emerging needs, challenges and opportunities for social engagement of the Church in the coming years.

Crucially, the journey you have embarked on...  
...is not just about today - it is about the long term response to today's challenges.

You have quite rightly begun to look at your own capabilities, and started to explore your own potential to contribute more fully to the good of our society.

And so I want to make a simple argument today.

The Blessed Cardinal Newman over 150 years ago proclaimed the need for a “common bond of unity”. He was right then and is right today.

Today, our passion for bigger and stronger societies provides an opportunity to promote a “new culture of social responsibility”.

And this means three things...

First, a massive change in how we think about Government and society,

Second, learning from the work faith communities are doing both at home and abroad

Third, an opening of opportunity to unlock new civic energy through public service reform

And above all, we need to understand that these priorities are intrinsically linked.

## **Last May**

Last May, two parties came together to form a strong, stable, coalition Government in the national interest.

As is widely recognised, the Coalition Government inherited an exceptional fiscal challenge: the largest peacetime deficit in our history.

The state was borrowing one pound in every four that it spent, and just paying the interest on the nation's debt, each year cost the British tax-payers £43 billion - around £120 million a day.

Therefore, urgent action to tackle the record budget deficit was unavoidable.

The consequences of not acting would have been extremely serious. Confidence would have fallen, interest rates would have risen, businesses would have failed, and jobs would have been lost.

## **Big Government versus Smarter Government**

The scale of the deficit required the Government to make tough choices about how taxpayers' money was to be spent.

But above all, the Coalition Government wanted to do more than just get our finances under control. We were determined to bring real change to our country and that vision was based on a big idea. It is unfortunate that we have to deliver this big idea of Big Society in the current fiscal climate. But this big idea pre-dates the financial crisis and the mess that this Government was left with and we are determined to deliver this vision.

For decades, Whitehall has championed its own corner - distorting the historic balance in our country.

There was the view that if the Government took a little more of your money, a little more power... they would be able to solve all of our country's problems.

Somehow we ended up modelling our Government on the top down, mass produced, hierarchical, slow-moving factories that business long ago abolished.

And the reality is – it didn’t work. We inherited an economy mired in debt, a society with big social problems and a political system in a mess.

## **Rights and Responsibilities**

This “big-government” approach... simply led to a more disempowered society.

A society: where we championed peoples “rights” and not their “responsibilities”.

A society: where we looked to the State for answers rather than communities.

Society lost the habit of demanding responsibility.

- So when a young boy misbehaved – we only looked to teachers to provide discipline.
- When litter built up in our neighbourhood, we looked to the Council to pick up our rubbish.
- When a business began to sell adult-style underwear for young children - we simply shrugged our shoulders.

Change was needed. We needed a “responsibility revolution:” which you have rightly recognised as a “conversion of the heart and mind”, which affirms there is a problem and that together we can do something about it.

But this can not be achieved by Government policy alone. It needs a smarter state, and an empowered society.

But, corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities — to one another, to our families, to our communities, and to society. This means...

- Parents taking more responsibility for their children and their behaviour.
- Neighbours looking out for each other, especially in their hour of need.
- Businesses being part of the communities in which they operate and make profit.

Responsibility is more about what we do and less about what the Government can do.

And it is about embracing innovation rather than regulation, seizing opportunities rather than deferring to burdens.

That is why as individuals, families, neighbours – we have the greatest power to build a big society.

Our tradition insists that to build a just society we need...

Personal responsibility..., social responsibility..., and corporate responsibility.

## **What is the Big Society?**

This brings me to the most important part of my speech today.

What is the Big Society and what are the opportunities it represents?

For me, the Big Society is about volunteering, social action, and a philanthropic approach to life...

But it is also about much more than that...

It is about opening up public services to local control...

And it is about radically devolving power from Whitehall to local communities.

Take any department's work— and the Big Society provides the principles to move away from a big bossy state to an energised, citizen owned, engaged country.

It is about listening, learning, acting and changing.

Ultimately, it is about accountability.

## **Catholicism around the world**

This brings me to a related point. You see, the Big Society is built on strong foundations; on deep human instincts. It takes its philosophy – its ideas from all across the world.

So before I talk further about the endless opportunities that exist for communities up and down our country. I want to briefly explore the huge contribution your Church and community is making to the lives of ordinary people globally – and how this has helped shape Big Society principles.

We can all see how Society has become deeply divided - as the gap between the rich and poor has widened.

Faced with these challenges, it has been communities, often led by the Church which has been at the cutting edge of tackling

- Drug and alcohol abuse, violent crime
- Broken families
- Poor standards in health and education

I am no theologian, but I know Catholic tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment and instructs us all to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

As I quote from James 2:26 "For even as the body without the spirit is dead: so also faith without works is dead."

Faith is not just a belief, it's not just a theory. It's about how we live, how we shape our lives and how we work together to serve those in need. And particularly in your case this has meant building social institutions to put principles into practice.

Right throughout the world, the Catholic community's commitment to service and solidarity, to deepening social engagement is expressed most concretely through religious orders, charities, chaplaincies, parishes and schools.

750,000 women in Religious Orders alone are making the most amazing difference:

- In the US they have founded schools in every state.
- Across South America they are engaged in community development and the care of street children.
- In Africa they are pioneers of health provision for the poorest.

But, Religious Orders go beyond that. Today they act as important sources of philanthropic giving; some matching our largest charitable foundations for size and social impact.

Even more immense is the scale of the work of Catholic welfare charities.

And it is the Church's official charitable arm - the global Caritas Federation which really is, dare I say it, a "global big society network". It is the world's largest voluntary sector coalition: helping 24 million people a year, mobilising 625,000 volunteers; and raising over \$5 billion annually.

In the UK, CAFOD, and SCIAF are respected and leading international aid charities and members of Caritas International themselves bringing relief to thousands.

### **The Church in the UK**

Back at home, I find inspiration from the work that you are doing. In town after town Catholic Churches are the "local community hub". These Parishes have launched lunch clubs for the lonely, meetings places for those struggling with alcohol, and care for people with mental health problems.

Of course today it would be impossible to discuss the Catholic contribution to social action without acknowledging the Church's work on education. In this country, schools are your single largest civic contribution.

## **Social Innovation**

Catholic social action is also huge in scope. You are not only helping to build civic society, but, importantly you are profoundly innovative. You do not only want to 'hang on to what you have got' but also seek the courage to ask 'what next?'

- In New York, you have helped found social enterprise schools, which have reduced truancy; by bringing together faith communities, companies, and young people at risk of poverty.
- In Vienna, you have established 'the second savings bank' helping those excluded from the banking system to open their first account; by using existing branch structures, volunteers and personalised financial counselling.

- And in Jersey a Catholic parish has converted a disused building into a community hub with language classes for EU migrants, a community cafe, welfare support and pastoral care.

And when we need to make limited resources go further, social innovations are paramount.

## **The Opportunities**

As I said earlier, for too long the State had sapped responsibility from individuals.

It had monopolised power and put faith in itself. It had stifled innovation, demoralised public service professionals, and taken control from communities.

Put simply, the old way – the top-down, big Government approach has failed Britain. It simply hasn't worked not least in many of our poorest communities.

The Big Society challenges citizens to think about the personal and social consequences of their behaviour...

... it challenges communities to take ownership of their community and find ways to positively transform it...

... and it challenges the state to ask: “why can this not be done by citizens themselves, or voluntary, community and social enterprises”.

But let's be clear, the Big Society will not spring up automatically overnight and it is not a cover for the government to leave the stage. The Government has a responsibility too.

We will retain our responsibility to ensure we have high quality flexible public services, to provide those services that only the state can, such as core police and defence functions, and we will ensure that the vulnerable are protected<sup>1</sup>.

But most importantly we will be a responsible partner and investor in building the Big Society...

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<sup>1</sup> *IF CHALLENGED:* The pupil premium and differential weighting of public health funding are examples of this.

We are investing £470 million in the voluntary sector and a further £100 million in a transition fund.

We are training 5000 community organisers across the country.

And this summer, we are launching the National Citizen Service, which will bring together 10,000 16 year olds from different backgrounds to encourage community cohesion and social action to come more naturally.

But more than this we want public services to become genuinely ‘public’.

In the Localism Bill, we are introducing a “Community Right to Challenge” enabling voluntary and community groups to express an interest in running a local authority service. This new power will hand the initiative to these groups, where they believe they can run local authority services differently or better.

We are introducing a further power called the Community Right to Buy which will ensure that community organisations have a fair chance to bid to take over assets and facilities that are important to them. These facilities could include the village shop, the community centre, or the library.

We have also established a Big Society Bank which will provide new money through intermediary organisations for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations who wish to provide public services.

Finally, we will put more control of local matters in the power of local people.

For instance we will enable the local community to elect chief police commissioners...,

...we are reforming planning to give communities more control...

...and our free schools agenda will enable parents to take greater control of their children's schooling.

### **The devotional deal**

The era of “Whitehall knows best” is over.

Today I have outlined the culture change that is going on through Government. I have outlined what the big society is about. And what we hope we can achieve together.

It's about a new culture of personal, social, and corporate responsibility...

...and it demands that we all learn from the lessons of recent decades and put a genuine commitment to the common good of others at the heart of all we are doing.

As you have rightly recognised in our country today “many yearn for a richer community life, a society characterised by stronger social bonds and a great acceptance of our mutual responsibilities”.

We must not be tempted to turn inward, becoming indifferent and sometimes isolationist in the face of our responsibilities.

The solution to social problems like crime, drug abuse and poverty is not to insulate ourselves from their consequences or hand the response to someone else. It is to fight them together.

We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. As the Pope stated “the development of peoples depends, above all on a recognition that the human race is a single family.”

The Catholic Church is already doing so much to help build the Big Society...

... and you have the power, the creativity, and the experience to help tackle some of the most pressing social challenges we face.

As I said in my speech at the Anglican House of Bishops last year...

...and as the Prime Minister re-iterated days later in the farewell to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI...

... this Government recognises and respects the role that religion and people of faith play in our society.

But above all, today's conference is about deepening that engagement. I welcome your commitment, your courage and your determination to make a difference.

In the years to come I hope we can look back together and see that this conference went beyond resolutions and it began a journey characterised by innovation, openness and hope.

Accept the challenge you have set yourself.

Take the opportunity that this moment offers.