

## The Santa Marta Group

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Home Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

6 May 2021

Dear Home Secretary,

I am writing on behalf of the Santa Marta Group regarding the New Plan for Immigration.

The Santa Marta Group was launched by Pope Francis at the Vatican in 2014 and is led by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster. Its purpose is to create partnerships between civil society, church, law enforcement and criminal justice actors to deliver strategic and operational responses to prevent, prosecute and protect in human trafficking cases worldwide. The Catholic Church as an international organisation has unique and enduring access to communities and leaders across the globe and can be a force for good in this endeavour.

We welcome the UK Government's stated commitment to ensuring that police and courts have the necessary powers to bring perpetrators of modern slavery to justice, while giving victims the support they need to rebuild their lives. However, we are deeply concerned that the substance of the New Plan for Immigration risks undermining that aim.

The policy statement makes extensive reference to abuse of protection mechanisms, placing disproportionate emphasis on a very small number of cases and proposing more restrictive criteria for support, while overlooking the genuine failings in the UK's response to trafficking and modern slavery. The reality is that a significant proportion of victims are never identified, most of those who are do not receive adequate support, and prosecutions of criminals responsible for exploitation are extremely rare.

We therefore strongly encourage you to refocus the Government's response towards prioritising:

**-The creation of an effective National Referral Mechanism** that efficiently identifies and supports victims, as well as providing reliable information for statutory and non-governmental organisations in prevention and prosecution of modern slavery cases

**-A consistent recognition that modern slavery is not an immigration offence** as demonstrated by the fact that the many victims are British nationals, and the majority are legally present in the UK; in all cases they are victims of serious crime and this must be the focus

**-Measures that focus on pursuing perpetrators** and do not criminalise victims

Furthermore, the introduction of new barriers to entering and seeking asylum in the UK risks pushing more people into the hands of traffickers. Across the world it has been consistently demonstrated that policies criminalising those seeking sanctuary and introducing new border security measures do not save lives but are simply a charter for trafficking.

Rather, tough criminal sanctions against traffickers must be combined with more safe and legal routes for those in need of protection. Steps such as the creation of new UK Border Force powers to stop and redirect vessels, combined with shortcomings such as the absence of any target for the UK Resettlement Scheme, will only compromise the intention to stop traffickers and protect victims.

Based on the experience of our partners across the world, we recognise that addressing the evils of human trafficking and creating a just asylum system with human dignity at its core are not mutually exclusive, but essential to one another. We urge you to work with faith and civil society groups in reshaping the new plan for immigration, to ensure that the UK fulfils its moral and legal obligations to end modern slavery.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Wb' followed by a stylized flourish.

**Bishop William Kenney CP**  
**The Santa Marta Group**

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