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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **CHILD ABUSE LINKED TO BELIEF IN SPIRIT POSSESSION – ‘NEW DfES GUIDELINES WILL FAIL CHILDREN WITHOUT CONCERTED ACTION NOW’, SAYS CCPAS**

Leading child protection agency welcomes report but raises serious questions on implementation

Problems of spirit possession-based child abuse will not be solved by government edict alone. The new DfES Guidelines will not achieve their aims unless as a matter of urgency, statutory agencies and faith communities come together to tackle the issues. Without concerted action now, the Guidance will fail the very children who need protection the most.

This is the chilling verdict of the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS) in its response to the DfES's new consultation document *Working Together to Safeguard Children - Safeguarding Children from Abuse linked to a belief in Spirit Possession*, which is published tomorrow.

In welcoming the report and noting that the government has drawn on the pioneering work undertaken by CCPAS with some of the communities concerned, David Pearson, Executive Director of CCPAS said 'I am pleased to see the emphasis on the early identification of abuse and on the need to understand the wider context in which such abuse takes place. This is essential if children at risk are to be discovered in the first place and effective preventative measures put in place

However Pearson has reservations on how the guidance will be implemented. He said: "The consultative document inevitably seeks to address the roles and responsibilities of the various key statutory agencies in individual cases. Traditionally social workers and police officers operate on a case by case basis and this is vital where there are concerns about an

individual child. But the consultation document and previous government sponsored research also highlights the need to tackle these issues on a broader front. This demands a major cultural shift in the way these agencies operate.

“Will this actually happen? Unless it does and a sense of urgency is injected into tackling the issues, other children who might be at risk will not be discovered and necessary measures will not be put in place to prevent future cases of abuse.

“These issues can only be tackled effectively if the statutory agencies and the faith groups work together at all times so that the community’s confidence is gained, sound safeguarding measures are put in place and abusive practices exposed and dealt with . Without this, even with the best will in the world, the guidance may inadvertently end up alienating those faith communities who already feel marginalised and not part of society.

“If that does happen, there is a grave danger that groups who may be engaging in practices that could harm children may slip through the net – thereby putting those children at greater risk of being abused.

CCPAS is also concerned that some parts of the guidance seem somewhat naïve. Communities that have experienced horror in their country of origin are often terrified of repatriation. To expect oppressed, marginalised, frightened people to calmly "seek advice from the statutory authorities" is simply not realistic.

Former Metropolitan Police Detective Inspector Bob Pull, who was operational lead on Project Violet, and who is now Communities Consultant for CCPAS, commented: “It is extremely difficult to detect, gather intelligence and obtain successful prosecutions if communities do not engage with statutory authorities. The Child B case, though high profile, was the exception not the rule – we need to bear in mind that the major part of the work of Project Violet was focused upon education and training. With the help of communities, such atrocities can and will be prevented. This makes costly and sometimes ineffective investigations unnecessary and ultimately reduces the abuse of children in a faith-based context.

“At the instigation of CCPAS, DfES and Home Office officials are today meeting members of the newly-formed Congolese Pastorship to discuss the guidelines. It is a shining example

