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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **“THEM VERSUS US’ STAND OFF BETWEEN AUTHORITIES AND FAITH GROUPS MAY LEAD TO CHILD ABUSE IN ISOLATED FAITH COMMUNITIES”, SAYS CCPAS**

David Pearson insists: ‘positive engagement’ the solution for marginalised faith groups

The “them versus us” stand off that is in danger of developing between the statutory authorities and some faith communities could put children at greater risk of being abused.

This is the chilling message that David Pearson, Executive Director of the Churches’ Child Protection Advisory Services (CCPAS) will give in his keynote address at an important conference on safeguarding African children\* on Tuesday 16 January.

With major new guidance from the DfES on abuse linked to belief in spirit possession expected within the next few weeks, Pearson will call for much more positive engagement between the authorities and those faith communities. He will say: “without this, the guidance may inadvertently alienate 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 them at risk of being abused. Having said that, it is obvious that the faith communities in turn have a similar responsibility to engage with the authorities. Within the spirit of existing statutory guidance ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’, it is vital that all agencies working with children, including faith groups, engage with each other at all times in order to ensure we give children the best possible protection”.

Pearson will also reveal examples of good positive engagement to the conference. Last week, a group of Congolese pastors attended an important meeting at the House of Lords, where they briefed parliamentarians on how robust child protection policies have been

implemented within the Congolese church community over the last 18 months. This is the culmination of a programme of training that has been devised and carried out by CCPAS and the Metropolitan Police, one of the highlights of which was a training session involving 230 Congolese pastors and church leaders.

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 faith communities refuse to engage with the statutory authorities.

"With the help of these communities, such atrocities can be prevented. This makes costly and sometimes ineffective investigations unnecessary and ultimately reduces the abuse of children in a faith or belief based context. The newly-formed Congolese Pastorship, whose members actively encourage child safeguarding policies and procedures, is a shining example of how a faith community can take the initiative to help church leaders and workers in an environment of proper accountability".

\* *The Role of Faith Organisations in Safeguarding African Children*, held by Afruca, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, 16 January 2007

Media Enquiries:	Iain Taylor Taylor Communications 01732 461060 or 07979 914217 <a href="mailto:taylor.comm@tiscali.co.uk">taylor.comm@tiscali.co.uk</a>	or	David Pearson CCPAS 0845120 4550 or 07836 376803 david@ccpas.co.uk
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#### NOTES TO EDITORS:

The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS) is an independent Christian charity providing professional child protection advice, support and training to churches, faith and other organisations throughout the UK and beyond.

Every week it is involved with:

- 30 churches/faith organisations helped in developing child protection policies
- 830 children's workers and leaders trained
- 500 contact helpline (24 hours) or email for advice
- 300 criminal records checks carried out for churches and faith groups

For more information, please see [www.ccpas.co.uk](http://www.ccpas.co.uk)