

PRESS STATEMENT

28 July 2010

Joint statement from the Evangelical Alliance, Churches Together in England and the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service in response to the Dispatches programme “Britain’s Witch Children.”

The Evangelical Alliance and Churches Together in England represent thousands of churches from across the evangelical community, including African churches.

We wholeheartedly condemn churches abusing or encouraging the abuse of children, in particular any church that brands children as witches or demon-possessed.

However, we would like to stress that Monday’s *Dispatches* focused on a small rogue element of pastors, and the vast majority of African churches in the UK do not subscribe to these practises.

We are disappointed that Channel 4 made no attempt to contact either the Evangelical Alliance or Churches Together in England for comment during the production of this programme. We are also dismayed that the programme did not feature any Christian representatives, who would have condemned these practises and provided the context that they are not tolerated in the vast majority of African churches.

We will therefore be making a representation to Channel 4 explaining our unhappiness with the imbalance shown by the programme.

The programme also omitted to mention the huge strides forward that Evangelical Alliance member organisation, the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), has made over the past few years in developing and implementing effective child protection policies in African churches in the UK.

CCPAS has trained more than 5,000 African church leaders and volunteers in the optimum standards of child protection. This programme is ongoing; this month, it launched a 50-minute safeguarding training DVD which tackles this issue directly and is available in 15 languages.

Steve Clifford, General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, said: “There is no justification, in any circumstances, for child abuse or sexual abuse, and we wholeheartedly condemn any cases of the vulnerable being abused or exploited in the name of God.

“We call on churches to operate a policy of zero-tolerance of abuse in their ranks and we strongly advocate that all churches put the highest standards of

child protection systems in place. We are partnering with CCPAS to make this process as easy as possible.

“The vast majority of churches – whatever their cultural background – foster respect, nurture and care for children.”

Dr Joe Aldred, Secretary of Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs for Churches Together in England, said: “Churches providing social and spiritual support in the African and Caribbean communities in the UK have a long history of exemplary work that has been recognised widely.

“This Christian community has never encouraged or tolerated abuses of children and vulnerable people. This remains the case and anyone found breaking the law under the guise of faith should be reported to the authorities.”

None of the churches or pastors featured in the programme are members of the Evangelical Alliance or Churches Together in England.

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Media enquiries: Charis Gibson
Evangelical Alliance
020 7207 2117
07917 050126
c.gibson@eauk.org

NOTES TO EDITORS:

The Evangelical Alliance UK, formed in 1846, is an umbrella group representing over one million evangelical Christians in the UK and is made up of member churches, organisations and individuals. As part of a movement ‘uniting to change society’, the Alliance promotes unity and truth, acts as an evangelical voice to the state, society and the wider Church, and provides resources to help members and other evangelicals live out their faith in their communities.

Churches Together in England is the national body set up by the churches in 1990, and has partner bodies in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. At a national level Churches Together in England has 32 Member Churches or Councils of Churches and 27 Bodies in Association. Churches are also continuing to develop ecumenical commitment locally and at intermediate (county) level.

Churches Together in England is a visible sign of the Churches' commitment as they seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another, and proclaim the Gospel together by common witness and service. Its strength comes from people from different traditions finding new ways to work and worship together.

CCPAS is an independent Christian charity providing professional child protection advice and support across church denominations and organisations throughout the UK. For more information, please see www.ccpas.co.uk

CCPAS is part of The Safeguarding Children's Rights initiative. Established in 2007 by Trust for London, the initiative brings together key organisations and agencies tackling faith-based abuse in African communities in London. This also includes AFRUCA, Africa Policy Research Network, the UK Congolese Safeguarding Action Group and Victoria Climbié Foundation.

The independent evaluation of the initiative, by the Centre for Social Work Research (based at the Tavistock Clinic), shows that so far:

- Many African churches in London have engaged with child protection issues including undertaking training and making positive changes to systems and worship to improve the general safety and well-being of children in their congregations.
- The practices of a minority of 'rogue' churches and pastors are being challenged by African communities. This voice has been strengthened by community-led meetings and training for parents and young people.
- Specialist training has improved social work and health practitioners' knowledge and understanding of harmful cultural practices, which is critical to improved identification of abuse linked to spirit possession and witchcraft.

Click [here](#) for CCPAS's good practise paper for working with faith communities and places of worship – spirit possession and abuse. CCPAS's safeguarding DVD is available [here](#).