

News release

18 April 2018

“Reforms are urgent, now is the time for tough action”: Dame Margaret Hodge

Christian leaders united in the House of Lords on Tuesday 17 April to challenge government inactivity on tax justice reforms and to demand tough action, now. Launching “Church Action for Tax Justice” (CAT), President Designate of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Michaela Youngson, joined Lords Rowan Williams and Richard Harries, Dame Margaret Hodge and Quaker Leader Paul Parker to demand an end to corporate tax evasion, greater transparency and a change to the negative narrative around tax.

In her speech to a packed committee room, the Revd Youngson said: “I hope we can shift the narrative around tax away from it being a dirty word, or a necessary evil, but rather a blessing and a means of all citizens having a stake in a generous society that cares for all.” Dr Rowan Williams talked about an “unquenchable thirst for more” in the corporate sector (referencing the name of the Christian Aid report), a “wilful blindness” amongst policy makers and how tax should not be “an us and them but a recognition of shared goals and mutuality”.

Opening the meeting, Dame Margaret Hodge, chair of the APPG on Responsible Tax, congratulated the new initiative, saying: “there has never been a more important time than today to address issues of tax justice...this is not anti-business but pro fairness...Reforms are urgent, now is the time for tough action.”

CAT will seek to inspire all Churches about the urgency of creating fairer and more effective tax systems to fund healthier public services, both in the UK and internationally.

Dr Rowan Williams, who chairs Christian Aid, commenting in advance, said: “The creation of this new Church-wide movement is timely. Many of the world’s largest companies seem to have forgotten that they have moral duties, as well as legal ones. They must support human flourishing, not least by paying their fair share of taxes in all the countries where they do business - and being fully transparent about the relevant data.”

Ending financial secrecy in UK tax havens like the British Virgin Islands is one of the reforms CAT will pursue, along with changes to the way large multinational companies are taxed.

In addition, the new campaign will call on Churches themselves to make more vigorous and vocal use of their power as investors in major companies.

CAT has developed out of the Methodist Tax Justice Network and seeks to be more ecumenical, embracing all Church denominations.

One recent sign of the success of the worldwide movement for tax justice has been the decision by Vodafone to publish its country-by-country reports from 2019 onwards. Christian Aid, the Tax Justice Network and others have long campaigned for major multinationals to publish such data, because it can throw up suspicious patterns that alert tax authorities and civil society to potential tax dodging. This, in turn, helps them to hold companies to account.

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