

***Statement from Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor,  
Archbishop of Westminster***

It is clear from the Prime Minister's statement that he has listened to some of the concerns of the Catholic Church in regard to its adoption agencies.

We are, of course, deeply disappointed that no exemption will be granted to our agencies on the grounds of widely held religious conviction and conscience. We look to the forthcoming Parliamentary debate to address some of the fundamental issues centred on the well-being of the child, whose needs must always be put first.

We note and welcome, however, the Governments expressed desire that the experience and excellent work of our agencies is not lost, especially for the benefit of needy children.

We appreciate the two year period that will be established for independent assessment. We note that one of its purposes will be to "ensure the valuable expertise of faith-based adoption agencies in successfully placing the most vulnerable children, including the full range of post-adoption services, is retained and developed" (terms of reference). We understand that Local Authorities will continue to work with and fund our Catholic agencies in their vital and sensitive work during this period.

This debate has raised crucial issues for the common good of our society. We believe there is an urgent task to reach a new consensus on how best the public role of religious organisations can be safeguarded and their rights upheld.

An important part of our Catholic tradition is to work constructively with the Government in mutually respectful cooperation, in which we can act with confidence and integrity in the service of the common good.

Westminster Cathedral  
29th January 2007