**Church leaders’ letter to the new Prime Minister: a no-deal Brexit is gambling with the basic needs of our poorest citizens**

An open letter to the new Prime Minister from leaders of 7 Christian denominations expresses concern that failing to agree a deal on Brexit will “hit those held back by poverty very hard indeed”.

The Church leaders say they have been “compelled” to write to the new Prime Minister because of his position that leaving the European Union without a deal is acceptable.

The letter states that “At a time when increasing numbers of families have difficulties putting enough food on the table, we believe it is irresponsible to consider a course of action that is expected to make that situation worse”.

The Church leaders say that “It is notable that assurances about our ability to cope with a no-deal Brexit, while frequent, are yet to be supported by substantial evidence” and ask the Government to publish evidence of the impact a no-deal Brexit on disadvantaged communities.

The letter also invites the Prime Minister to visit one of the many social actions projects run by churches to support millions of citizens who live in poverty.

The letter is signed by leaders from the Methodist Church of Great Britain, the United Reformed Church, the Baptist Unions of Great Britain, Scotland and Wales, the Church of Scotland, the Salvation Army, Quakers in Britain and the Scottish Episcopal Church, which together have approximately 700, 000 members.

Specific concerns over food supply, pricing as well as availability of medical supplies and energy are raised in the letter.

The letter warns that, in the event that a deal is not reached, “In essence, the Government will be relying on the hope that our former EU partners are willing to co-operate even without an agreement – a huge gamble to take with the basic needs of our poorest citizens and communities.”

The full text of the letter is here:

**Dear Prime Minister**

As Churches, we have a particular care and concern for the people in our society who are locked in poverty. Around the country, local churches are helping families to cope with the rising tide of poverty. Projects range from simple coffee mornings run by a few volunteers, to large projects such as foodbanks, homeless support, employment advice and debt counselling.

With this in mind, we are compelled to write expressing our urgent concern about your position that leaving the European Union without a deal is acceptable. Advice and data from multiple reputable sources, including the UK Government, indicate that failing to agree a deal will hit those held back by poverty very hard indeed.

The UK imports 10,000 shipping containers of food from the EU each day. These containers are part of long and complex integrated supply chains. Even minor disruptions to this chain have in the past rapidly had serious consequences. A no-deal Brexit will cause a huge and potentially crippling disruption. Government and many other reputable sources highlight the immediate risk of shortages and price rises. Over the longer term they point to the costs of new and less fluid supply chains increasing food bills for families.

Last year our partner, Trussell Trust, which represents around half of the UK’s foodbanks, gave out a record-breaking 1.6 million 3-day supplies of food. At a time when increasing numbers of families have difficulties putting enough food on the table, we believe it is irresponsible to consider a course of action that is expected to make that situation worse.

It is also unclear how a wide range of other vital products and services will continue to be delivered in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Government, industry and charity sources indicate potential problems with both energy and medical supplies.

The UK Government’s no-deal planning documents highlight that many of the difficulties caused by a no-deal Brexit can only be tackled in collaboration with the EU. The Cabinet Office states that for many issues we must seek accommodations with the EU which are “not within the UK’s gift to unilaterally control or mitigate”. In essence, the Government will be relying on the hope that our former EU partners are willing to cooperate even without an agreement – a huge gamble to take with the basic needs of our poorest citizens and communities.

The impacts of a no-deal Brexit are at best highly uncertain, and at worst deeply worrying. Our view that it would put at risk the welfare and safety of the poorest communities in the UK is formed on the basis of the best available evidence, including our presence in local communities in every part of the UK . It is notable that assurances about our ability to cope with a no-deal Brexit, while frequent, are yet to be supported by substantial evidence.

Evidence-free dismissals of well-founded concerns are at this stage both dangerous and inappropriate. Your Government’s willingness to embrace a no-deal Brexit places upon it a responsibility to demonstrate that the most vulnerable in our communities, those locked in poverty, will not be harmed.

We ask that your Government urgently publishes its current evidence on the impact of a no-deal Brexit on disadvantaged communities. We would also be pleased to welcome you to one of our many projects to hear from those who a no-deal Brexit may most impact.

Rather than being absent from the debate, this evidence and these communities should be at the heart of our debates around Brexit.

We assure you of our prayers as you take up this challenging new role.

Yours sincerely

Revd Nigel Uden, Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church

Mr Derek Estill, Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church

Professor Clive Marsh, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

Revd Dr Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference

Revd Dr Richard Frazer, Convenor of the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland

Rev Lynn Green, General Secretary, Baptist Union of Great Britain

Rev Alan Donaldson, General Director, Baptist Union of Scotland

Parchedig/Reverend Judith Morris, Ysgrifennydd Cyffredinol/General Secretary, Undeb Bedyddwyr Cymru/Baptist Union of Wales

Most Revd Mark Strange, Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church

Commissioner Anthony Cotterill, Territorial Commander, The Salvation Army

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain

**Ends**

**Notes for editors**

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