

Pax Christi demand end to PM's war-making powers

Nick Benson

The Prime Minister's power to take the country to war should be abolished, an international Catholic peace movement has said.

Pax Christi believes that this power should instead be transferred wholly to the House of Commons with high targets in place so that if such an event were to happen it would have been made after exhausting any other possibilities.

The movement's proposal comes in response to a far more feeble one by the Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC), in which MPs suggested that tougher safeguards are needed to prevent a prime minister taking the country to war without adequate Cabinet consultation.

The PACAC said that a key finding of the Chilcot inquiry into the run-up to the Iraq War regarding lack of Cabinet discussion had been ignored.

The report states that although the Cabinet Secretary is personally responsible for making sure that scrutiny of key decisions happens in line with the rules in the cabinet manual, their only resort is to resign if a prime minister decides to ignore their advice.



A protest takes place outside Downing Street, against the British government's decision to attack Syria in April. Her decision to attack without a vote in the House of Commons was heavily criticised. Photo: NurPhoto/SIPA USA/PA Images.

The MPs have recommended that this situation should be changed so that the Cabinet Secretary can ask the PM for a written ministerial direction to ignore the normal decision-making process, and then be able to decide whether to make the

situation known to Parliament.

However, Pat Gaffney, General Secretary of Pax Christi, labelled the proposal "modest".

Highlighting the UK's long history of military action as a means of solving political problems at home and abroad, Ms Gaffney pointed out several examples from the past 20 years, including the Iraq war and David Cameron's military intervention in both Libya and Syria.

Ms Gaffney also warned that Theresa May had followed a similar path, going so far as to say the current Prime Minister is "appearing to revel in the prospect".

"The modest proposal made by PACAC, following Chilcot, goes nowhere near the heart of the matter," Ms Gaffney told *The Universe*.

"Tinkering with the bureaucracy of

the Cabinet Office is not the appropriate way to deal with this issue.

"The heart of the matter is the PM's continued power – delegated by the Monarch – to wage war abroad.

"This should be abolished and the power transferred wholly to the House of Commons, except in the case of imminent danger of invasion, as foreseen by our membership of the UN," Ms Gaffney added.

"Any vote by MPs must attain at least 70 per cent of those eligible to vote. This is a deliberately high bar.

"And there should be one further requirement: all MPs must hold a constituency meeting to gauge the support of the electorate for war.

"Similarly high targets should be put in place, to make the choice for war as hard as possible," she concluded.

Call to support abortion petitions

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Meanwhile, Labour backbencher Stella Creasy and Tory MP Dr Sarah Wollaston are among MPs calling on Prime Minister Theresa May to allow a free Commons vote on abortion law reform in Northern Ireland.

Ms Creasy and Dr Wollaston both claim that reforming Northern Ireland's abortion laws would be respectful of devolution.

Accepting that devolution is "extremely important", Dr Wollaston claimed that it was a human rights matter and therefore should not be devolved.

"I think it would be perfectly reasonable for the Prime Minister to allow this to go forward," she told Channel 4 News.

Ms Creasy organised an emergency backbench debate on Northern Ireland's abortion laws in the House of Commons on Tuesday.

However, fellow backbencher Jacob Rees-Mogg, a staunch Roman Catholic, insisted it should be a matter for Northern Irish politicians to decide.

He urged Mrs May to encourage all parties in Northern Ireland to restore devolved institutions including the Assembly, which has been suspended since January 2017.

"This issue is really one of devolution," the North-East Somerset MP told LBC radio.

"This responsibility is devolved to Northern Ireland and if you respect our constitutional settlement then these issues ought to be decided in the right place."

Meanwhile, Arlene Foster, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader, claimed that Sinn Fein voters are prepared to vote for the DUP because of its uncompromising stance against abortion, and republicans have praised their pro-life stance.

Sign the petition: To sign RTL's CitizenGo petition see:

www.citizengo.org/en/node/162425?tc=gm

To contact your local MP see: bothlivesmatter.org/contact-mp

Memo from CAFOD

CAFOD
Just one world

Your steps can make a difference

After working at a refugee camp in Tanzania and as a migrant living in England, the words of Pope Francis resonated deeply with me when he launched the Share the Journey migration campaign last September.



He said: "Hope is what drives the hearts of those who depart... It is also what drives the hearts of those who welcome: the desire to meet each other, get to know each other, to dialogue."

This is why CAFOD's campaign Share the Journey – built around a solidarity walk and petition – is the perfect way to respond to Pope Francis' call.

CAFOD is inviting Catholics across England and Wales to join a symbolic 24,900-mile walk to share our humanity and bear witness to migrants and refugees. Every step we take will send a message to world leaders that they must step up too when they sign new agreements on refugees and migrants in September.

Will you show your solidarity with refugees by joining one of CAFOD's Share the Journey walks? Find out more at cafod.org.uk/sharethejourney

By Marine Harrington, CAFOD's Community Participation Coordinator

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Slain boy's dad urges society to tame social media 'beast'

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He said that, for gangs, "there isn't specific legislation, and clearly we can't use terrorism legislation [but] in consultation with the CPS, we have found some existing legislation which we are going to use".

Under the Terrorism Act, there does not need to be a link between the incitement of someone to commit an act of terrorism and a specific attack.

Mr Stokley said the new measures could work in a similar way in that there would be no need to link any online post to particular acts of violence, adding that if the judiciary disagree with the idea then the force will look at helping to develop new legislation with the Home Office.

Welcoming the proposal, Mr Mizen told *The Universe*: "This potentially

new way of trying to combat the most violent aspects of the use of social media has to be given a chance.

"It might be seen as a draconian measure, however this consideration has to be put to one side as the amount of violence that is being driven is fuelling a dramatic rise the loss of life, particularly among young men."

The move follows a rise in violence, with more than 60 murder investigations launched already this year in the capital alone.

It was recently revealed that YouTube has deleted just over half of the music videos Scotland Yard has asked to be taken down because they incite violence, according to police figures.

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick has blamed social media for fuelling a surge in murders in Lon-

don, singling out the drill genre of rap music for glamourising violent crime.

Drill videos easily able to view online feature hooded and masked gangs threatening each other with violent lyrics, gestures and hand signals, with some attracting millions of views.

The Met has built up a database of more than 1,400 videos to use as an intelligence tool as the force tries to tackle an increase in killings and other violent crimes.

"This cannot, in all humanity, be allowed to continue. I believe we should give this proposal our backing. Hopefully it will only be needed in the short term," added Mr Mizen.

"Should it prove to be successful then we will at least have a viable deterrent for this aspect of a huge issue for us all."