4. WRITING TO YOUR MP

“Like any MP, I take messages from my constituents very seriously. If you care about an issue that Parliament is considering, it’s definitely worth getting in touch.”
Rt Hon Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham

Your personal letters or emails to MPs have a big impact. Writing is one of the most powerful actions you can take. CAFOD will sometimes provide you with a template letter or email, but it is better for you to personalise your argument – say why you care about this issue in particular.

MPs know that if one constituent writes to them on an issue, there are at least ten others who care deeply, but don’t have the time to put pen to paper or mouse to mat.

1. Check their title

It’s important to check if your MP’s a member of the Privy Council and therefore ‘Rt Hon’ or if they have a professional title such as ‘Dr’.

2. Make sure you include your address on the letter or email

This is crucial. Your MP will not respond if they don’t know you are their constituent.

3. Get to the point

Letters should be no more than two sides of an A4 sheet. Don’t feel like you need to be an expert and drown them in waves of facts and data. If they want more detailed information, send CAFOD briefings or bullet points.

4. Keep it personal

Say how the issue affects you, what it means to you and why you’re writing to them. This is far better than using a template letter or email as MPs sometimes take a sudden influx of identical or similar messages with a pinch of salt, since they know it takes less effort to sign these. Much more notice is taken when lots of constituents write in different ways and through different routes.

5. Remind them: you voted for them

This is what MPs care most about. When raising an issue try, “Like most voters in my constituency / like the majority of voters.” If you’re supporting one of their policies: “I’m proud to see this government take action to fulfil its promise to voters.” And if you’re criticising something they’ve done: “Your government has abandoned a long-standing promise to the voters.”

6. Show them the support

Point out how much media interest your issue has, as MPs like acting on ‘hot’ topics. Mention any involvement you have with local schools, churches or organisations.

7. Suggest practical solutions to the problem

Decision-makers like this. CAFOD will always be clear about the practical steps it would like government to take, so make sure this comes across in your letter.

8. Call for a realistic, specific action

This is the most important part. Ensure that your MP knows exactly what you want them to do about your issue. The action needs to be appropriate to the person being asked and timely to decision-making processes –

cafod.org.uk/mpc
CAFOD will always offer you guidance (see 5. What action can your MP take?). Stress that as a constituent you want them to act.

9. Ask for a reply
Ask them to let you know when they have taken the action you requested. Have your questions been answered? If you think they haven’t, write back politely requesting a more detailed response.

10. Give thanks
Even MPs need a little love. Letters of support and thanks for a job well done also make a difference. Thank them if they sign an Early Day Motion (EDM), ask a question in parliament, or if their party has a policy change. If they’ve already acted, acknowledge the good work they’re doing and press them to do more.

WHO SHOULD I WRITE TO?
Can I write to any MP I like?
MPs can only respond to enquiries from people in their constituency; they can’t act for another MP’s constituent. They have a duty to listen and respond to their voters – but not to anyone else.

Can I write to a minister?
Letters addressed directly to ministers tend to get sifted out and answered by junior-level officials. Instead, write to your MP and ask them to raise your issue with the relevant minister. The minister will then reply to your MP out of courtesy and your MP will often forward this response to you. This kills two birds with one stone: the minister gets to see how strong the campaign is because all the letters come through their private office and the MP becomes aware of the issue too.

Why should I write to my MP if their party is not in government?
The issues that matter to us such as poverty, climate change and ensuring the dignity of the person have cross-party support. Maintaining the pressure on parliament is vital to ensure policy change and to hold the government to their promises.

When should I contact one of my MEPs?
If you have a question about European laws, the European Parliament, Commission or Union, MEPs may be able to help. More and more UK legislation is originating in Europe. CAFOD will therefore be increasing our engagement with Members of the European Parliament and EU policy matters.

When should I contact one of my Welsh Assembly Members?
Write to your MP about international and development issues. The Welsh Assembly’s area of responsibility includes education, NHS services, local authorities, housing, environment, transport, agriculture and culture and heritage in Wales.