



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental  
Development Organisations

Dóchas – The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

**\*\*IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

## **MEP Candidates Commit to Champion International Development**

Candidates for the European Parliament election outlined their positions on key international development issues at a roundtable event in Dublin today.

The event, organised by Dóchas - a network of 59 international development NGOs in Ireland, provided an opportunity for the candidates to set out how they would shape development and humanitarian policy and contribute to Ireland being a positive global force on the EU stage.

The next European Parliament will have an important oversight role in the implementation of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the policy direction of development and humanitarian funding within this.

Hot on the agenda were some of the main challenges that lie ahead for international development, including climate change, growing inequality, issues of peace and neutrality, the rise of populism, and migration.

Candidates in attendance included: **Barry Andrews**, Fianna Fáil; Councillor **Ciaran Cuffe**, Green Party; Councillor **Gary Gannon**, Social Democrats; **Senator Alice Mary Higgins**, Independent; **Mark Mullan**, Independent; **Councillor Éilis Ryan**, Workers' Party.

**Suzanne Keatinge**, CEO, Dóchas, said: "It is very encouraging to see so many candidates who are keen to engage in conversations around the EU's role in international development and humanitarian action. We need to keep challenging ourselves to reach the furthest behind across the globe and, for that to happen, the EU has to provide stronger leadership based on the founding values of equality, human rights and partnership.

"Ireland has an important leadership role to play now in Europe, particularly on aid. We believe it is essential that we ensure Ireland's Official Development Assistance (ODA) contribution is being used for its intended purposes to alleviate poverty and reduce vulnerability and that it does not undermine the high quality of Ireland's own aid programme. We need those strong MEP voices to champion our cause."

**Barry Andrews**, Fianna Fáil, said: "My values are centrist. They're about pragmatism... One third of the next European Parliament will be Eurosceptic. There will be a lot of voices we're not used to hearing from. We need strong, passionate people who believe in those European values.

On migration and conflict, Andrews said: "The EU has been an absolute disaster on this front. People think if you apply lots of development aid, it will stem migration. This is short-sighted and inaccurate. We must not try to apply sticking plasters, but address causes instead."

**Councillor Ciaran Cuffe**, Green Party, said: "We're facing huge challenges, in governance, in trade regimes, in geography. Looking at global challenges, and the rise of ultranationalism, it's really important to talk about what brings us together. The big issues of climate change and globalisation need collective action."

On climate, Cuffe said: “Climate and migration need to be bundled together. Climate change will be a significant factor that fuels the numbers of refugees and economic migrants. It must become a focus. We have to divert funding away from armaments to helping countries to mitigate the effects of climate change.”

**Councillor Gary Gannon**, Social Democrats, said: “The greatest challenge that faces us is rising inequality, but I think we have to call it for what it is and use the word ‘poverty’... Inequality is the greatest threat to the EU, a structure built on shared ideas and peace.”

He continued: “We cannot allow people to live in poverty, or die in the Mediterranean Sea. We must open doors and see ourselves as part of a global village, as global citizens.”

**Senator Alice Mary Higgins**, Independent, said: “What’s happened in the past with development issues, is they have become a side piece that we added on. We need to become serious about them and place them at the centre. The SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] are an amazing global blueprint for that. They’re a really good example of joined up thinking, but how we achieve them is vital.”

On policy coherence, Higgins said: “We must ensure that trade and tax policies don’t undermine the capacity of governments to deliver on sustainable development or to respond to citizens when they demand this.”

**Mark Mullan**, Independent, said: “I believe in the core Irish values of generosity, compassion, neutrality and respect for human rights. We must defend and promote these in Europe.”

On Irish neutrality, Mullan said: “Irish neutrality was hard fought for and we need to defend it. The Irish military should not join the EU army. This would blur the space for Irish humanitarian and development actors. It should continue to serve under UN peacekeeping missions.”

**Councillor Éilís Ryan**, Workers’ Party, said: “I’ll champion the development budget and champion aid, but a more important role of the EU is in thinking about the conditions that could create a planet beyond aid, and to ask what are the conditions required for economies in the Global South to no longer need aid.”

On public attitudes, Ryan said: “How we can tackle the causes of racism and a lack of solidarity? As long as the housing crisis exists in this country, no amount of rhetoric or education will tackle racism... We need people who won’t just speak out against racism but who will tackle the inequality that is growing racism as well.”

## ENDS

For further information, please contact Lía Flattery, Dóchas Communications & Events Officer, at [lja@dochas.ie](mailto:lja@dochas.ie) or (0)1 4053801.

### Notes for the editor:

- Dóchas is the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations. It provides a forum for consultation and cooperation between its 59 members, and a platform for them to speak with a single voice on development issues. For more information, visit: <http://dochas.ie/>.