

PRESS RELEASE

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NGOs welcome Ireland's role in leading UN response to global AIDS pandemic

Government declares determination "to keep our shoulders to the wheel"

Irish NGOs have today welcomed the contribution made by Ireland to the international strategy to combat the spread of the global AIDS pandemic.

At a United Nations General Assembly High Level Meeting on AIDS, attended by more than 3,000 people, Ireland negotiated strongly to strengthen the Political Declaration adopted by the world body.

"Thirty years into the AIDS epidemic, and 10 years since the landmark UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, world leaders came together to review progress, and adopt a plan of action for the global AIDS response", said Dr. Enida Friel, representing Irish NGOs at the Summit.

The summit showed that the global AIDS response is working. New UNAIDS data show that steady progress is being made towards the United Nation's objective of "zero new infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths", through the provision of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

"Dóchas welcomes the Declaration adopted by the Member States at the end of the summit meeting, because it contains clear and measurable targets for countries and everyone involved in HIV and AIDS response. The challenge is now to implement those targets. And this is where leadership and accountability from all involved will be important," said Mr. Hans Zomer, Director of Dóchas, the umbrella group of Ireland's development NGO sector.

"We have evidence that international cooperation is working. But there are still millions of people who are not receiving treatment, and we need to invest more in the prevention of the spread of the disease. We are making real progress, but to safeguard that progress we will need global solidarity and partnership - especially now, in these times of fiscal austerity", added Mr. Zomer.

Irish NGOs have over the past number of years built up a broad reserve of expertise, and developed programmes that are making inroads in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

"For their part, Ireland's NGOs, through the Dóchas HIV and AIDS Working Group will make sure that Ireland stays on track, and honours its international commitments. Because we must keep our promises, but also because Ireland

has reason to be proud of its international leadership position in this area – Leadership that enhances our standing in the global community,” said Dr. Enida Friel, HIV&AIDS Programme Coordinator at Oxfam Ireland.

Irish NGOs were represented at the Summit, as part of the official Government delegation, by Dr. Enida Friel, Chairperson of the Dóchas HIV and AIDS Working Group, and HIV and AIDS Programme Coordinator at Oxfam Ireland.

“It was a great honour to represent Irish civil society at such a high level summit. It was an opportunity to influence UN decision-making, and I was impressed by the sheer hard work that goes behind the scenes by those negotiating the final Declaration – including our own Irish officials,” said Dr. Friel.

“Seated proudly in Ireland's place in the UN General Assembly Hall, I was pleased that Ireland's Ambassador to the UN, Ms. Anne Anderson, reflected in her statement most of the points put forward in Dóchas' position paper, published in the run-up to the summit, and submitted to the Tánaiste, Eamon Gilmore”, said Dr. Friel.

While emphasising that the AIDS response represents a multifaceted challenge, Ms. Anne Anderson highlighted two areas of particular priority for Ireland protecting and empowering women and the human right dimension.

“I want to recognise the importance of leadership. It costs nothing but it is vital to our combined efforts. This HLM encourages all of us to re-focus – to strengthen our ambition...It leaves us more determined than ever to stand up and speak out on behalf of those affected by HIV and AIDS and those at risk”.

“Today... we are facing hugely challenging economic circumstances in Ireland. But we are determined to keep our shoulder to the wheel”, said Ms. Anderson.

[ENDS]

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NOTES FOR THE EDITOR

- More information on the UN meeting is available at <http://www.un.org/en/ga/aidsmeeting2011/>.

The Meeting took place 10 years after the historic 2001 UN GA Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV&AIDS, and the 2006 signing of the Political Declaration where

UN Member States committed to universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

More than 30 Heads of State, Government and Vice Presidents attended the summit, along with senior officials, international organisations, civil society organisations and people living with the HIV virus. Ireland's Official Delegation was led by the Irish Ambassador to the UN Ms. Anne Anderson and Dóchas was represented in it by Dr. Enida Friel, Chair of Dóchas HIV and AIDS Working Group and Oxfam Ireland's HIV&AIDS Programme Coordinator.

- Ireland's statement to the summit is available at http://www.dochas.ie/Shared/Files/4/Ireland_speech_United_Nations_High_Level_Meeting_on_HIV_and_AIDS.pdf
- Dóchas Position Paper on the 2011 United Nations Special Session on HIV and AIDS is available at http://www.dochas.ie/Shared/Files/4/UNGASS_Dochas_HIV_AIDS_Group_Position.pdf
- Dóchas is the association of Irish Non-Governmental Development Organisations. It provides a forum for consultation and cooperation between its 46 members, and helps them speak with a single voice on development issues. For more information, visit: www.dochas.ie

Dóchas Member Agencies

1. A-Z Children's Charity
2. ActionAid Ireland
3. Afri
4. Africa Centre
5. Aidlink
6. Alan Kerins Project
7. Amnesty International Ireland
8. Camara Education
9. Centre for Global Education
10. ChildFund Ireland
11. Children in Crossfire
12. Christian Aid Ireland
13. Christian Blind Mission Ireland
14. Church Missionary Society Ireland (CMSI)
15. Comhlámh
16. Concern
17. Friends of Londiani (Ireland)
18. Galway One World Centre
19. Gorta

20. Habitat for Humanity Ireland
21. Irish League of Credit Unions International Development Foundation (ILCU/IDF)
22. Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs (ICJSA)
23. Irish Council for International Students (ICOS)
24. Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA)
25. Irish Foundation for Co-operative Development (IFCD)
26. Irish Missionary Union (IMU)
27. Irish Red Cross (IRC)
28. Kerry Action for Development Education (KADE)
29. National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
30. Oxfam – Ireland
31. Plan Ireland
32. Progressio Ireland
33. Self Help Africa
34. Sightsavers International Ireland
35. Skillshare International Ireland
36. Suas Educational Development
37. Tearfund Ireland
38. The Hope Foundation
39. The National Council of Ireland YMCA Trust
40. Trócaire
41. Vita
42. Voluntary Service International (VSI)
43. Voluntary Service Overseas (Ireland)
44. Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM)
45. War on Want Northern Ireland
46. World Vision Ireland