



PRESS RELEASE – 13/07/09

Irish Forum to Review MEPs' Work Urgently Needed, Say Anti-Poverty Campaigners

On the first day of term for Ireland's newly elected MEPs (Tuesday 14th July), Dóchas and the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, have come together to urgently call for an Irish forum that will allow MEPs to engage with voters, groups and individuals, so that they can account for how they are living up to their election promises and commitments.

"It's hardly surprising that people complain about a democratic deficit when there is absolutely no formal opportunity for MEPs to be held to account in Ireland by the voters who sent them to Brussels," said Anna Visser, Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network.

During the European election campaign, Dóchas and EAPN Ireland organised a series of high-profile nationwide debates for candidates to spell out their intentions and plans to help make poverty history at home and abroad.

"We heard many fine words and supportive sound bites," said Hans Zomer, director of Dóchas, the umbrella group of Ireland's overseas development NGOs. "Now we deserve an Irish forum where Irish voters can engage with their elected representatives about their plans and strategies to eradicate poverty".

Dóchas today joined EAPN Ireland, to call on Minister for European Affairs Dick Roche and Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government John Gormley to implement a simple two-point plan to raise awareness nationally on the activities of our elected MEPs:

- The Minister for European Affairs urgently needs to formulate an alternative to the defunct Forum on Europe, which would allow Irish NGOs, citizens and people who actually experience poverty and social exclusion to engage with their MEPs.
- The Minister for the Environment and Local Government needs to follow through on his promise to implement the Seanad Reform Bill, which states that MEPs should regularly be invited to the Seanad to brief the Oireachtas on their priorities and practices on Ireland's behalf in the European Parliament.

"The closure of the Forum on Europe means that there is now no formal space – outside of the Oireachtas - for the discussion of European Affairs", said Ms. Visser. "It is in MEPs own interests to push for these reforms if we are to bridge the communication gap. Real reform will help to ensure that MEPs' work in the European Parliament will stay on the agenda for the duration of the next term."

ENDS

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Notes to Editors:

EAPN Ireland is a network of organisations, groups and individuals who work to put poverty and social exclusion at the top of the national and European Agenda. EAPN works to empower its members through training and information dissemination to engage with the policy making process on issues that affect their lives.

For more information, visit: www.eapn.ie

Dóchas is the association of Irish Non-Governmental Development organisations. It provides a forum for consultation and co-operation between its 44 members and helps them speak with a single voice on development issues.

For more information, visit: www.dochas.ie