

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good evening,

Welcome once again to our conference. My name is Elaine Mahon, and while some of you may know me from the Development Education (DE) programme of the National Youth Council of Ireland, this evening I am here to represent the Development Education Group of Dóchas, through which I am also the Dóchas representative on CONCORD's DE forum at European level. I'm very glad to have the chance to be here before you, and to give you some context of this conference and its organisation over the past months.

Most of you will already be familiar with the 'Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages' which was adopted by Dóchas members back in 2007. The current Code of Conduct had its origins in a previous Code written by CONCORD members in 1989, and it was the Dóchas DE Group which took the lead in drafting a new version of the Code, and then, set up a working group on the Code in 2008. This Code of Conduct working group has been active in supporting the implementation of the Code and events related to it. The purpose of the Code of Conduct is really to provide a framework which organisations can refer to when designing their public communication strategy, and to assist organisations to use images and messages in a fair and ethical way. The Code has over 50 signatory organisations to date.

The Africa Centre is both Chair and a very active member of the DE Group, and the Code of Conduct is a fundamental part of the Africa Centre's Development Education programme. Last September, the Dóchas DE Group supported the organisation of the Africa Centre's seminar called 'Portraying the Developing World – the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth?' which looked at how African countries are portrayed by NGOs and the media in Ireland. That seminar and the campaign 'Africa Also Smiles' are two of the very important ways in which the Africa Centre is at the forefront of challenging unfair and often

sensationalist stereotyping of the Global South, and African countries in particular. Today's conference is another aspect of this important work.

We cannot underestimate the impact that images and messages have on all of us - our perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. In Ireland today it is crucial that images and messages related to development are as fair and accurate as possible; not only to ensure the Irish population understands the complexities of development and the varied living experiences of people living in the Global South, but also so that people from a minority ethnic background living in Ireland are treated with dignity and respect, and do not experience negative stereotyping or discrimination based on what Joe Humphries calls in his article in today's Irish Times – 'ill-informed' messages which circulate about their countries of origin, rather than on the lived experience of individuals themselves.

Many organisations in Ireland are already moving from a charitable agenda to a partnership approach. This partnership approach should inform work overseas and our work in Ireland. Involving the experience and perspective of African and other migrant-led organisations will challenge the images and messages we use, and contribute to building an intercultural and integrated society. This is one of many reasons why the Africa Centre is such an important member of the DE Group and in promoting the Code of Conduct.

More and more people are starting to critically question the images and messages they receive about the Global South, especially as they meet, work, live and become friends with people from the Global South living in Ireland. The fair and ethical use of images and messages is becoming more important across many different sectors. In my own work at NYCI, we are writing a resource pack for our annual One World Week in November, and this year's theme is 'Images and Messages in Development' which was voted the number 1 priority by the young

people and youth organisations we work with. This may surprise you, as at first glance, the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages may not seem relevant to people not directly involved in development. But today's conference is about broadening the scope of this work. Is it a human-rights issue? If it is, then it is broader than just development. For instance, with young people and youth leaders, we at NYCI used a very simple and relevant example to introduce why Codes of Conduct are needed. We asked: *'How many of us have seen a photograph of ourselves that we didn't like and asked a friend to delete it? How would we feel if someone took that photograph, and not only kept it, but published it on billboards, in newspapers and on TV?'* It may seem like a flippant comparison - comparing disaster relief in Haiti with a teenager's Facebook profile - but linking the creation of our own public images on social networking sites to the importance of individual rights and dignity makes the issue very relevant to the young people we work with, and to those working in other sectors. With young people, we apply this same reasoning to the situations of vulnerable people in difficult circumstances, and the need to respect their rights is all the more evident.

Challenging our use of images and messages is an ongoing process; something we have to keep reminding ourselves of, and this conference is another opportunity to do so. The 2 days we have here will build on the Africa Centre's work in this regard, and look even more broadly at the use of images and messages, not only by NGOs but by the media, community organisations, and other forms of public information and awareness-raising. The conference includes a wide variety of speakers, facilitators and thematic workshops which we hope will encourage interesting discussions between you, the participants, which include NGOs, migrant-led associations, Traveller organisations, journalists, researchers, academics, students, members of the diplomatic community, and others from the Community and Voluntary Sector.

In closing and on behalf of the Dóchas DE Group, I would like to thank the Africa Centre for this initiative as it provides an opportunity to open a dialogue within the development sector; as well as between this sector and other stakeholders. I am sure this conference will bring this issue to an even wider audience, and I hope you all participate fully in and benefit from the event.

Thank you and enjoy the conference!

Elaine Mahon (NYCI)

on behalf of the Dóchas Development Educaiton Group

14 July 2010