

**Address by**

**Mr. Dermot Ahern TD.  
Minister for Social, Community  
and Family Affairs**

**at the Launch of**

**The White Paper on a  
Framework for Supporting  
Voluntary Activity**

**St. Andrew's Resource Centre  
114 - 116 Pearse Street,  
Dublin 2**

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**at 4.00 p.m.**

**Check against delivery**

Thank you all very much for coming here this afternoon. I'm delighted to be able to welcome you to the launch in the presence of the Taoiseach of the Government's White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector. It's a very historic day. The White Paper has been a very long time in the making. Today's publication has been preceded by an extensive consultation process with a huge number of community and voluntary groups up and down the country since the Green Paper was published in 1997.

### **Consultation process**

The Government see consultation as vital, and the consultative process leading up to today was probably one of the most intensive ever undertaken. Submissions were invited by my Department and a total of 56 regional seminars were held throughout the country. A Steering Group was also appointed to advise and assist on issues and directions for the White Paper. The process culminated in the hosting of a national seminar on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity in March 2000. My thanks are due to all parties who contributed with expertise and enthusiasm to this process and whose contribution is helping to shape the future direction of the relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary sector.

Many of you were part of that process. You will have come here today curious to see to what extent the issues you raised have been heard and addressed in the final product. I hope that when you study the White Paper, you will come away confident that you have been heard and listened to.

Obviously, the mere act of publishing the White Paper won't change the world overnight. The follow up and ensuring that the White Paper is implemented is going to be crucial. But I am confident that the White Paper is the start of an agenda for change which will have a real impact on the work you do in your local communities. I really do believe that you will look back in five or ten years time at this day and see that it was the start of something radical.

### **Issues raised by Community and Voluntary sector**

Before I outline the main features of the White Paper, I think it is worthwhile reminding you - if that is necessary - of what you told us during the consultation process are the main issues that you wanted to see addressed in the White Paper. These are

- defining the statutory and the Community and Voluntary sectors and their roles
- the nature of the relationship between the sectors

- the principles and structures to underpin the relationship between the two sectors, including issues of consultation and representation
- the need for a shared and defined vision on the parameters of the relationship between the two sectors
- the role of and support for volunteering
- funding and support for the Community and Voluntary sector
- implementation and monitoring of the White Paper decisions.

### **Scope of White Paper**

I think it is worth drawing out from that list the important point that the focus of the discussion is on the nature of the relationship between the two sectors. The objective of the White Paper is to put a more cohesive framework of support in place for the Community and Voluntary sector, rather than funding or delivery mechanisms for the day-to-day work the sector engages in. Thus the content of the White Paper is about principles and structures and support for the sector, rather than being about community development, or the arts, or rural development, or sport, or the environment, or personal social services, or any of the many other areas in which the Community and Voluntary sector is active.

However, the slightly abstract issues of principle and structure that the White Paper deals with have a very real - and heretofore in many cases very negative - impact on the work on the ground. I am happy that we have delivered a set of decisions about new structures and systems that will bring about real improvements over time in the day-to-day environment in which your local groups and organisations operate.

Just by way of an aside, however, I would draw your attention - in case any one thinks that this Government haven't also been dealing with the bread-and-butter issues - to the fact that the amount of money being spent in support of community and voluntary groups has increased from £487 million when the Green Paper was published in 1997 to nearly £1 billion now. The amount of money we are allocating to community development, social services, sport, youth services etc. has more than doubled since this Government came to office. I just mention this by way of an aside, lest anyone say that all this stuff about principles and structures is all very fine, but where is the beef!

### **Main features of the White Paper**

So what is actually in this White Paper?

The publication of this White Paper is the start of the Government's long term strategy to develop and support the sector. It marks a fundamental change in official attitudes to support for community and voluntary groups. The White Paper sets out the rationale for developing the relationship and the principles which should underpin the relationship.

The main features include:

- Formal **recognition** of the role of the Community and Voluntary sector in contributing to the creation of a vibrant, participative democracy and civil society. The Government is making it clear through this publication, that we see statutory support of the Community and Voluntary sector as having an importance to the well being of our society that goes beyond 'purchase' of services by this or that statutory agency. We see the Community and Voluntary sector as essential partners in economic and social development.
- Introduction of mechanisms in all relevant public service areas for **consultation** with Community and Voluntary sector groups and to allow the communities they represent to have an input to policy-making

- **Multi-annual funding** to become the norm for agreed priority services and community development activities. This will mean a major move away from the present unsatisfactory and ad hoc funding schemes experienced by many community and voluntary groups
- Designation of **Voluntary Activity Units** in relevant Government Departments to support the relationship with the Community and Voluntary sector
- Holding of regular **policy fora** by relevant Departments and agencies to allow for wider consultation and participation by the Community and Voluntary sector in the policy-making process
- **'Best practice' guidelines** in relation to consultation by statutory agencies with the Community and Voluntary sector and in relation to funding mechanisms and systems, to which all Government Departments and statutory agencies will be expected to adhere
- Transfer of responsibility for charity regulatory matters and the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. I am committed to ensuring that comprehensive legislation on regulation of charities and their fundraising is produced as a priority.

The sector will be consulted in the development of the legislation through the Implementation and Advisory Group.

- An ongoing **review of funding programmes and schemes**, to be carried out by the Implementation and Advisory Group working under the aegis of the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, to bring about a more coherent and user-friendly system of funding and support. The long term aim is to change from the existing highly-fragmented funding and support system to one based on the concept of single line funding and single line reporting mechanisms. This is a long-term task and won't be achieved easily, but we really must bring some order and rationale to the present maze of statutory funders and schemes and end the burden it imposes on community groups and voluntary agencies in applying to a number of different sources for funding for different aspects of what they intend to be an integrated programme of activities to meet local needs.
  
- An immediate **cash injection** of £7 million for:
  - National networks and other federations and for Community and Voluntary infrastructure and supports



- Support for the Community and Voluntary Fora established in each city and county in the context of the setting up of County and City Development Boards
- A research Programme which will include quantifying the full extent of voluntary and community activity in Ireland, its contribution to social development, to the economy and to employment.
- 2001 is the UN International Year of Volunteers. As provided for in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, a National Committee on Volunteering will be established this year, with participation from all the relevant interests and stakeholders. It will devise strategies and actions for supporting and developing volunteering, not just during the International Year, but for the longer term. £1 million has been specifically allocated for support of the Committee's work.

### **Implementation of White Paper Proposals**

The Government is committed fully to the major task of transformation which this White Paper requires. We are convinced that this is the optimum response to develop the relationship between the State and the community and voluntary sector. Further work needs to be undertaken on the proposals outlined in the White Paper and an Implementation and Advisory Group will be established by the end of the Autumn.

The Group will oversee the implementation of the decisions contained in the White Paper and identify unresolved issues arising in a national context and pursue a resolution as far as possible. It will also provide a forum for discussion of issues of general relevance to the relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary sector and help to promote awareness in this area.

The Group will be co-chaired by the Departments of Health and Children and my Department. It is envisaged that membership of the Group will be drawn from the relevant Departments, statutory agencies and from a wide range of interest in the Community and Voluntary sector. In keeping with the spirit of the White Paper, it will be a matter for the sector itself to agree on a mechanism to ensure appropriate representation from the sector on the Group. So, that is now an invitation and a challenge for you.

We look forward to the opportunity of engaging further with the community and voluntary sector in the dialogue that will transform the aspirations expressed in this Paper into reality.

## **Conclusion**

So, in five years time, I believe that the community and voluntary sector in particular will be playing an even more important role in both our economy and our society.

We will have fostered voluntarism and communal activity by ensuring that our policies and programmes in this area are appropriate and supportive and that individuals and communities are enabled to reach their full personal and social potential.

We will have strengthened partnership between the State and community and voluntary groups, bringing existing partnership at a national level into the day-to-day operation of every Government department, public body and local authority.

We will have put in place more and better funding for the sector, both through increased and better structured public funding. But also, and I believe this is critical to the future development of the sector, through greatly increased private sector funding.

Finally we will strengthen both the community sector and local government through putting community development at the centre of local government and by establishing real partnership between local government and local community groups.

This covers the broad thrust of the recommendations in the White Paper. Its development was a major undertaking, and it would not have happened without the expertise and critical input of the members of the Steering Group and the consultants who worked with my Department.

I want to thank them for their commitment, and to acknowledge the major role they played in the production of this Paper. Their insightfulness and strategic vision, as well as their wealth of knowledge has been vital to the process. Sincere thanks are also due to those from other Departments and agencies who contributed text and inputs into the work of the Paper and, of course, to my own team of officials in the Department.

Thank you.

**ENDS**