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***STATEMENT BY MINISTER MARY COUGHLAN  
IN RESPONSE TO “EVERY CHILD MATTERS”***

***Child Poverty***

There has been much progress made in reducing child poverty. This Government have implemented the largest series of Social Welfare and Child Benefit increases in the history of social welfare in this country. Child Benefit has more than tripled from €38.10 per month in 1997 to €125.60 today.

The percentage of children experiencing consistent poverty reduced from over 11% in 1998 to 6.5% in 2001 (latest figures available). It still, however, remains too high. Tackling child poverty is one of the major priorities under the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion which was launched just a month ago.

The revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy sets out a series of targets in relation to children and young people. The overall objective, in line with the National Children's Strategy, is to eliminate child poverty and to move to a situation of greater equality for all children in terms of access to appropriate education, health and housing. It aims specifically to reduce the number of children who are consistently poor to below 2% by 2007 and to reduce the gap in low birth weight rates between children from the lowest and highest socio-economic group by 10% from the 2002 level by 2007.



Child Poverty is the subject of a Special Initiative under *Sustaining Progress* and under the *National Action Plan on social inclusion*. The aim is to clearly establish the causes and recommend the most effective ways of tackling it.

ENDS September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003