Encouraging Trend In Eliminating Poverty - Mary Coughlan Minister For Social And Family Affairs

Major inroads into tackling child and family poverty are underway and showing encouraging results, said Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs.

"This Government is targeting poverty with a number of initiatives, and there have been significant reductions in the numbers of people experiencing consistent poverty - falling from 9.7per cent in 1997 to 5.2per cent in 2001.

"Equally there has been an encouraging drop in figures for consistent child poverty, again dropping from 15.3 per cent in 1997 to 6.5 per cent in 2001.

"I welcome the publication of Combat Poverty Agency's 2002 annual report and I fully agree with Director Helen Johnston's concern that we put tackling child and family poverty to the fore.

"I have put both these issues at the top of my agenda - and this Government remains committed to reducing the number of those who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent and if possible eliminate consistent poverty by 2007 by implementing our recently published NAPS blueprint for action.

"We are making progress year on year in tackling poverty - and I expect that progress to continue. This Government remains committed to meeting the NAPS income target of 150 a week in 2002 terms for the lowest rates of social welfare payments by 2007, with the equivalent level of child income support being set at 33-35per cent of the adult rate," said Minister Coughlan.

"Child benefit has increased by 133 per cent since 2000 and the Government has indicated its commitment to complete the planned round of increases announced in Budget 2001.

"In addition, under Sustaining Progress ending child poverty is a special initiative and we will continue to work with the Social Partners to ensure a better start for every child. The initiative will target services such as health, parenting, pre-schooling and education and amenities as well as income.

"A range of services benefiting children in low income families have been introduced or substantially enhanced in recent years, such as the school completion programme launched last year and the expanded school meal/breakfast scheme - the funding for which I doubled to 4million last year," added Minister Coughlan.

ENDS October 7th 2003