



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Invites Over 30 Welfare Organisations To Meet Individually With Him On Their Concerns

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., today (Monday, 11th October 2004) issued a personal invitation to over 30 national organisations and campaign groups in the social welfare area to meet individually with him over the coming months.

Minister Brennan issued the invitation when addressing the organisations at the Pre-Budget Forum in Dublin at which they were invited to give their views and make submissions on social welfare changes and improvements, which they would like to see included in the forthcoming Budget.

Minister Brennan said; "I have invited each of the organisations to individually come and meet with me because these are the people on the ground who care for and represent those who most need our help and genuine support. I want to listen directly to what really concerns these organisations and to see what can be done to address those concerns. As Minister for Social Affairs I am in the business of finding solutions by making sensible decisions that have at their core increased support for those who feel most vulnerable, neglected or apprehensive in our society. While I cannot promise to implement everything you may propose, I can assure you that I will give all of them all very serious consideration."

In his opening address to the Forum, Minister Brennan said that his priority was to deliver a welfare and social services support system that will reach out to include all who need and are entitled to assistance.

Minister Brennan continued: "Many of us are fortunate enough to have reaped the benefits of living in an Ireland that has witnessed great surges in economic growth in recent years. That economic performance has allowed us to tackle many of the social and economic issues that in the past scarred this country's reputation as a place of care and refuge. For example, as recently reported, the unemployment rate is now 4.4%, the second lowest in the developed world, down from 11.5% in 1996. This is just one example of the truly staggering change in the economic and social life of this country over a relatively short time.

We must maintain that sturdy economic growth by encouraging expansion in business, greater competitiveness, continued investment in education and training as well as putting in place flexible mechanisms to encourage people to enter and re-enter the workforce.

As we have seen in recent days, all the predictions are for continued growth. That is, of course, good news. However, its true benefits will be seen only if the fruits of that economic growth benefit all and not just the few. As I have said many times, our economic progress is not intended to make millionaires of the few while many others face a daily struggle.

Despite the impression given by some commentators, my Department is central to the social and economic life of this country and I have no doubt that you would



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concur with this view.

The Government is proud of our investment in social provision. This year, my Department will spend over EUR11.3 billion or almost 29% of all Government expenditure. Each week, payments are made to around 960,000 persons while a further 540,000 families receive Child Benefit each month. In other words, the services operated by my Department impact directly on the daily life of almost everyone in this country and this is reflected by the wide spectrum of society represented by your organizations".

Minister Brennan said that despite the range of new personal opportunities now available and the associated high expectations, there still remain many who need our collective help.

"In the great economic surge this country has witnessed the reality is that not all boats were lifted by the rising tide of prosperity. I, as Minister for Social Affairs, am determined to tackle the areas where people are being left behind. Resources will be targeted on helping those most in need in order, not alone to raise their standard of living, but to ensure that everyone is a valued citizen who makes their own individual contribution to society regardless of their individual circumstances".

This includes:

- older people who were central to the building of the new Ireland and who want to spend their twilight years in security;
- the thousands of carers throughout the country who selflessly sacrifice so much of their lives to look after loved ones;
- widows and widowers who have had to face many difficulties;
- people with disabilities who struggle against great personal odds and are an example to all;
- and, all those others who require income and other supports at various difficult stages of their lives.

Minister Brennan added; "Throughout my career in public life, my goal has been clear. I have fought to sustain economic progress so that we could do something positive with it for the people represented here today by the many organizations, and others. That is the purpose of economic growth. I want to again reiterate that there is no conflict between my economic views and my social responsibilities. As Minister for Social Affairs I will work tirelessly to ensure that the fruits of our economic success contribute to making a difference to the lives of the hundreds of thousands of people around the country who depend on our social welfare system."

ENDS October 11th 2004