



Minister Mary Coughlan addresses Social Inclusion Forum

"The true value of the National Anti Poverty Strategy may be better seen at a time when we are faced with hard choices and economic constraints", Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs told the NESF's Forum on Social Inclusion today. "It is all the more important in these times that there is a clear and coherent policy framework in place to ensure that priority continues to be given to the weakest and most vulnerable in our society", added the Minister.

Minister Coughlan re-iterated the objectives of the National Anti Poverty Strategy and stressed that they are not just aspirations. The range of clear targets set out in the Strategy backs them up. These targets, said the Minister, cover virtually the full spectrum of Government activities, reflecting the fact that poverty and social inclusion are issues, which can only be tackled effectively through a cross-cutting and multidimensional strategic approach.

Minister Coughlan's Department just recently established an Office for the Social Inclusion, which will have a key responsibility in driving forward the implementation of the Strategy. One of its immediate tasks is to oversee the preparation of Ireland's second National action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. In addition to reporting on the work-in-progress and developments, the Plan will equally reflect the outcome of consultations with the stakeholders, all of whom were represented at today's Forum.

"There are many challenges facing the National Anti Poverty Strategy and the Social Inclusion Unit of my Department, but I am confident that we will meet these challenges and reach our goal", added the Minister.

ENDS

30th January, 2003