



## **Hanafin opens European Anti-Poverty Network conference**

### ***Building Social Europe: from Crisis to Opportunity***

**“Bringing about an end to poverty and building a society for all are the goals that countries right across the European Union have decided will be the focus of national attention for the year”** said Mary Hanafin T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs today (19<sup>th</sup> February 2010) . The Minister was addressing over 200 delegates from across the European Union at the European Anti-Poverty Network Conference - Building Social Europe: From Crisis to Opportunity in Dublin’s Croke Park.

Minister Hanafin said the European Anti-Poverty Network has for over 20 years sought to ensure that the fight against poverty and social exclusion is high on the agenda of the European Union. **“The designation of 2010 as European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion provides us with the opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved, to learn the lessons from the past and to lay the foundations for the type of society that we all aspire to have - a society in which every individual feels valued and has the resources to participate in the activities that are regarded as the norm – a society for all.”**

**“Building an inclusive society is at the heart of the Irish Government’s National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The**



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**goal of that plan is to progressively reduce the numbers of people experiencing consistent poverty and to eliminate consistent poverty by 2016. Considerable progress has been made in recent years. The rate of consistent poverty in the population is now 4.2%. The rate has been halved since 2003 when it was 8%. This means that over that period 133,000 people were lifted out of consistent poverty”** said Minister Hanafin.

The Minister went on to say the **“immediate challenge is to maintain the progress made in recent years and to protect those who are most vulnerable in the economic downturn. The Government is determined to achieve the elimination of poverty and restoring economic growth and providing high levels of employment are the first essential steps to achieve that aim.**

**“Working to restore the economic growth we have benefited from over the past decade is now, therefore, the overriding priority for achieving the goals and targets of the Government’s National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in the years ahead. Major adjustments have been needed to get the public finances back on track and to lay the foundation to bring employment back to the where it was before the economic downturn. In making very difficult decisions, in the tough budgetary environment in which we find ourselves, the Government was determined to do its utmost to protect the most vulnerable people in Irish society and protected from any reductions those**



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**over 66 as well as children in welfare dependent and low income families.**

**Right across schemes and programmes the Government sought to ensure that as far as possible there would be no rowing back on the very real improvements and gains made in recent years for some of the most vulnerable people in society.”**

Turning to the aims and objectives of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, Minister Hanafin said it affirms the importance of collective effort and engagement of all interests – Government, local authorities, voluntary and community groups, employers, workers, farmers, and people experiencing poverty – in the fight against social exclusion.

Minister Hanafin concluded by saying the EU year is an opportunity to promote the importance of an EU wide consensus that the elimination of poverty across all member states must be a key purpose of the new strategy for 2020 to make the EU a smarter, greener social market economy. **“The 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty & Social Exclusion presents a major opportunity to engage with all interests as part of an EU wide debate on how we can build on what has been achieved and plan and set priorities for the future. This conference aims to present concrete proposals for building a social Europe with the capacity to end poverty and social exclusion.”**

**ENDS**