

**Irish organisations working in Central and Eastern Europe and the  
Former Soviet Union:  
Open Meeting**

**Date:** Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2009

**Venue:** Carmichael Centre, North Brunswick Centre, Dublin 7

**Time:** 2.00-5.00pm

**Present:** Sile Byrne (Facilitator), Mairie Cregan (Aurelia Trust), Ned Hayden (Burren Chernobyl Project), Damien Meaney (Chernobyl Children's Project International), Mick Croghan (Chernobyl Orphans Fund), Fiona Dowling (Comber), Hans Zomer (Dochas), Niamh O'Grady (European Anti-Poverty Network), John Mulligan (Focus on Romania), Maia Mgaloblishvili - Ryan (GENESIS), Ronan Ryan (GENESIS) Karen Kennedy (Habitat for Humanity), Audrey Cranston (Health Action Overseas), Pat Vaughan (Health Action Overseas), Delia Pop (Hope and Homes UK), Tom McEnaney (International Orphanage Development Programme), Michael Gannon (Irish Friends of Albania), Helena Clarke (Irish Friends of Albania), Frances Haworth (Moldova Vision / Comber), Des Macmahon (Next Step Georgia), Pat Gibney (Romanian Appeal Helpline), Stephen Conway (Samaritan's Purse) Joanna Fortune (To Russia With Love), Kieran O'Brien (Unicef), Helen Walmsley (Voluntary Service International), Davina Gilbert (Zest4Kids)

**Minutes and Output**

**Introductions and overview**

Fiona Dowling (Comber) opened the meeting and welcomed participants. She gave a brief overview of Comber's history and how the idea of starting a Network had come about. In 2006 when she started working with Comber she began networking with other groups and found it a very useful way to share information and ideas. Over the last year, she had met with Moldova Vision and Focus on Romania and it was decided amongst these groups to bring other organisations together to see if a Network was feasible.

Each participant was then asked to briefly introduce themselves and their organisation.

Sile Byrne then held an open session asking 'Why did you come to the meeting today and what could we get out of a network?'

Answers included:

- Networking
- Greater exposure for CEE/FSU region
- Lobby group
- Avoid duplication

- Stronger influence
- Meet people
- Information
- Expertise
- Specific area of interest
- Support

It was agreed there was huge knowledge and resources in the room and that a lot of groups had areas in common.

### **Dóchas**

Hans Zomer, Director of Dóchas, Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations, then gave a presentation on the history and workings of Dóchas. He outlined how members had come together to form Dóchas in 1993 (following a merger of CONGOOD and the Irish National Assembly) to set objectives and mission for members. Dóchas now has 44 members which are united around two main objectives: having a collective voice on development issues and improving their practices. Dóchas has 3.5 staff and members pay fees based on a % of their income (minimum €250 a year). Hans talked about mini-networks or working groups under Dóchas – which comprise members working on common issues, such as disability, development education, humanitarian aid etc. Hans identified 5 key ingredients for a successful network:

- Identifying a key problem that the network will seek to solve
- Commitment (energy, time & resources)
- Trust (feel good, respect)
- Shared values
- Accountability (predictability, transparency)

Hans spent some time talking about Dóchas' role in raising standards of practice with members. Dóchas developed the Code of Practice in relation to Use of Images about the Development World (supplied in packs).

Dóchas indicated that it might be possible for the CEE/FSU Network to become a Dóchas working group if members were in favour of this.

### **Breakouts**

Participants then broke out into three groups, with the aim of introducing themselves and talking about their work.

### **Hope and Homes**

Dr. Delia Pop, Director, Hope and Homes UK, gave a presentation introducing the organisation and giving an overview of their work in de-institutionalisation in the region.

## **Unicef**

Kieran O'Brien, Advocacy Officer, UNICEF Ireland gave a brief presentation and overview of Unicef's work in the region.

## **Conference – 14<sup>th</sup> December 2009**

Frances Haworth (Comber) introduced a conference being organised by Comber in December 2009 and invited everyone present to attend and get involved.

## **Conclusions**

It was agreed in theory that a network was a good idea but a lot of details needed further discussion, such as structure, scope, membership etc

It was agreed that the group should meet again before December

Meanwhile,

- an online directory of organisations should be established and contact details of attendees circulated by email also
- a closed online forum should be established for members