

Dermot Ahern launches campaign to raise awareness of human trafficking

The Department of Justice and Law Reform has today joined forces with the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland to raise public awareness of human trafficking across Ireland.

At Stormont, Justice Minister David Ford launched the Blue Blindfold campaign which will run across Northern Ireland for the next three months while in Dublin, Minister Dermot Ahern also launched a public information campaign.

Launching the campaign in the Republic of Ireland, Minister Ahern said: **“The trafficking of human beings for sexual and/or labour exploitation or the removal of organs is a most serious offence that has no place across the island of Ireland. We are very committed to taking a strong approach to jointly combating this crime and urge all members of the public to assist us in this task.**”

There is no specific type of person who could be a victim of human trafficking. It could be your neighbour. Therefore I appeal to each and everyone of you to familiarise yourselves with the indicators of this most dreadful crime and to act on your suspicions as one victim is one too many.”

In the Republic of Ireland, members of the public can familiarise themselves with what human trafficking is and how to spot the signs by logging on to www.blueblindfold.gov.ie or they can report suspicions of human trafficking anonymously to the Garda Síochána through Crimestoppers at 1 800 25 00 25 or via a dedicated email blueblindfold@garda.ie.

Launching the Blue Blindfold campaign which will include radio, outdoor, press and internet advertisements, Justice Minister David Ford encouraged people to open their eyes to human trafficking.

He said: **“It is difficult to accept that this form of modern day slavery is happening in Northern Ireland. I hope this campaign helps to open our eyes to this heinous crime and that people realise it could be happening in their town, street or even in their workplace.**”

“The campaign directs the public to the Blue Blindfold website www.blueblindfold.co.uk, where you can find out more information on what human trafficking is, how to spot the signs and what you can do to stop it.”

“The public have an important role to play in the fight against human trafficking. Men, women and children are being trafficked into and across Ireland as part of this evil trade and the public must remain vigilant and report any suspicious activity to the police.” the Minister added.

Anyone with suspicions of human trafficking in Northern Ireland can report their concerns anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. Information can also be found on www.nidirect.co.uk

David Ford concluded: **“I am pleased that both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have been able to launch campaigns to raise awareness of this important issue at the same time. Human trafficking knows no borders and it is important that we work together to highlight this crime.”**

17 January 2011

Note for Editors:

This campaign follows from the campaign initially launched in October 2008 by the Minister for Justice and Law Reform, Mr. Dermot Ahern T.D., together with Mr. Fachtna Murphy, then Commissioner of An Garda Síochána. This campaign was based on the ‘blue blindfold’ concept which had as its message ‘Don’t Close your Eyes to Human Trafficking’. The blindfold represents the risk of people having their eyes closed and being unaware of the crime that may be going on around them. In February 2010 a campaign based on the blue blindfold concept was run in Northern Ireland.

This campaign launched today 17 January 2011 will continue until 28 March 2011. In the Republic of Ireland during that period ads will be placed in the Metro herald newspaper at the start and the end of the campaign. Posters and leaflets have been circulated to all Garda Districts. Bookmarks and posters have been distributed to a number of libraries countrywide. Bookmarks, posters and leaflets have been sent to a number of other organisations including Vocational Educational Committees, Citizen Information Centres and Health Centres.

Key measures being taken by the Government to tackle the crime of human trafficking include:

- The establishment in late 2008 of an Interdepartmental High Level Group to recommend the most appropriate and effective responses to trafficking in human beings.
- The establishment in 2008 of a dedicated Unit in the Department of Justice and Law Reform which is working with over 70 different governmental, non-governmental and other organisations nationally and internationally, through a wide range of consultative fora. These include working groups dealing with the Development of a National Referral Mechanism, Awareness Raising and Training, Child Trafficking, Labour Exploitation Issues and Sexual Exploitation issues.
- The establishment of dedicated units within the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), the Legal Aid Board (LAB) in 2009 and in 2010 in the Health Service Executive (HSE).

- The Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 which provides penalties of up to life imprisonment in respect of these offences.
- A 60 day recovery and reflection period in the State for alleged victims of human trafficking and a further 6 months temporary residence, renewable to enable an alleged victim to assist the Garda Síochána in any investigation or prosecution.
- Publication in 2009 of a *National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking of Human Beings in Ireland 2009-2012*.
- Training for members of the Garda Síochána. Members of the PSNI, United Kingdom Borders Agency, London Metropolitan Police and Romanian Police also participated in this training.
- Training for trainers in organisations and specialised training for the staff of the Legal Aid Board who are providing legal aid and advice to potential and suspected victims of human trafficking.
- Awareness raising measures including the blue blindfold campaign, a film festival, articles on human trafficking in numerous publications and presentations at conferences.
- Provision of financial support to Ruhama and MRCI for the support and assistance they provide to potential victims of human trafficking for the purposes of sexual and labour exploitation.
- Development of Data Strategy based on systems being developed at EU level.

The arrangements for protection of victims include:

- accommodation is provided by the Reception and Integration Agency;
- medical care including access to emergency medical treatment/care planning, psychological and material assistance is provided by the HSE;
- repatriation is organised by the International Organisation for Migration;
- legal aid and advice is provided by the Legal Aid Board;
- translation and interpretation services are provided, when appropriate;
- access to education for children is also provided.

On the International front:

- Ireland ratified both the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons especially Women and Children supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The former came into effect for Ireland on 17 July, 2010 and the latter on 1 November, 2010.

- The Anti-Human Trafficking Unit and the Garda Síochána are working with a wide range of organisations in tackling this issue including the International Organisation for Migration, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the United Nations and the EU.
- The Garda Síochána also works in close co-operation with Europol, Interpol, Eurojust and Frontex.

Visit the website:

www.blueblindfold.gov.ie