

Remarks by H.E. Mr. Colin Wrafter, Ambassador of Ireland to South Africa at the Regional Seminar on Children who Cross Borders in Southern Africa

25 May 2009

Representatives of the Government of South Africa

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Delegates from the Governments of Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland.

Development Partners (DFID, USAID, SIDA)

Members of the United Nations Agencies

Members of civil society organizations

Representatives of learning institutions

Ladies and Gentlemen

I have the honour to make some remarks this morning on behalf of Irish Aid. We are delighted to have been able to co-fund the event with USAID.

The subject is topical and pertinent in terms of ensuring that the rights of all children are realized and that vulnerable children whoever and wherever they may be receive the protection they require. This seminar promises to be a landmark event in terms of

understanding and addressing the issue of children who cross borders within the Southern African Region.

It is particularly interesting that the two days preceding this event have been used to solicit ideas from children themselves who for a variety of reasons have left their homes and find themselves alone in a foreign land.

Through its 2006 White Paper on Aid, the Government of Ireland reiterated its commitment to children and in particular children who have been rendered vulnerable and to increasing its support for programmes that address the needs of orphans and vulnerable children, and that assist families and communities who care for children.

The allocation of resources towards supporting Orphans and Vulnerable children has been consistently high and was further defined through the development of internal guidelines for children living in the context of HIV and AIDS that were finalised in 2008.

Our support to children is premised on a number of non-negotiable principals which include the protection and safeguarding of vulnerable children and the fulfilment of rights in line with the UN Convention on Child Rights. We believe in poverty alleviation and

the importance of the family environment. We are also cognisant of the need to address issues of gender and inclusion especially for those children who are physically and developmentally challenged.

For the past six years Irish Aid has been supporting Save the Children UK to implement a programme in Southern Africa for orphans and vulnerable children in the context of HIV and AIDS. The objectives of that programme include:

1. Increasing the level of child participation in the decision making processes that affect them especially among orphans and vulnerable children within the context of HIV and AIDS.
2. Facilitating the development and review of legislation as it relates to children and scaling up best practices in OVC policy and programming.

The total value of the initial contract was from 2003- 2005 was €560,988 over 3 years. The programme entered a second phase in 2006 to enable the programming interventions to continue and to include a research component to support planning and advocacy with evidence and learning. This phase has a total value of €975,000 and will be completed at the end of this year.

It was through this research that the challenges facing children who cross borders were identified. Whilst some children may face the threat of being trafficked and others flee conflict or other traumatic situations as refugees, significant numbers of children cross borders on their own and having done so find themselves in a very precarious situation and exposed to a gamut of risks.

This seminar, which brings together experience, expertise and takes cognisance of the testimonials and suggestions of children, is a unique opportunity to explore what can be done to reduce vulnerability. It is hoped that key questions will be addressed. For example -

Where do we tackle the problem from-at the point of origin or destination?

What drives children to leave home and journey to the unknown? and

What is being done and what more can we do?

The outcome of these discussions we hope will assist Governments and Civil Society organisations in this region to plan and programme effectively.

I am particularly pleased to note the collaboration in this event with Wits University Child Migration Studies programme and also with SADC. The discussions and learning that will take place here over the course of the next two days, I am assured, will feed into a series of ministerial and high level SADC meetings. This type of sharing is key in advocating for children in this region at the highest level. I also anticipate that the outcomes of this meeting will include a continued model for coordination around the issue of child migration among the stakeholders here present.

Finally, I look forward to fruitful deliberations and practical and pragmatic outputs which will translate the rhetoric into actions for the protection and well being of our children.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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