

PRESS RELEASE – 4th June 2009

14 MEP Candidates Support a Rethink of Europe's Trade Strategy to support development.

With elections to the European Parliament taking place tomorrow, voters interested in the plight of those living in some of the world's poorest countries will be interested to learn that a significant number of MEP candidates are supporting a full rethink of Europe's trade strategy. They want EU trade policy makers to support developing countries, hard hit by the current global economic crises and recent cut backs to overseas aid. The EU is in ongoing trade negotiations with countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Whilst the deals the EU is seeking may secure big profits for a few large European companies, this comes at the expense of local people and the environment.

14 Irish MEP Candidates across all the political parties, including 6 sitting MEPS have publicly pledged their support for a full-scale rethink on EU trade policy to ensure it prioritises development, gender, social and environmental justice as well as human rights objectives across the world. They intend to use their term of office to help bring about a fairer approach to Europe's trade with poor countries if elected on Friday.

Comhlámh, the Irish Association of Returned Development Workers, is part of an EU-wide network of civil society organisations which is calling on MEPs to seize the opportunity and argue for a rethink of EU trade policy. Fleachta Phelan, Campaigns & Policy Officer with Comhlámh said "The global financial crisis has highlighted the need for a change in direction where trade and economic policy are concerned. It has demonstrated to people in rich countries what those in poor countries have known for years: the current international economic system doesn't work. Unfair trade deals are part of the problem, and Europe's policies risk making things worse for the poorest people in the world. Now more than ever, a change is needed"

Irish development workers who have returned from periods working overseas are delighted that MEP candidates across all parties are recognising that better and fairer

trade deals with the EU can support development and lift millions of people in Africa, Asia and Latin America out of poverty.

“Following the recent drastic cutbacks to our aid programme, the impact of which has been devastating to developing countries, it is heartening for our members who have first hand experience of the effects of unfair trade deals on poorer countries, to see that our MEP candidates are committing to support a re-think of the EU’s current trade policy, that is subjecting millions to years of poverty”, Phelan said.

“In recent years Ireland has taken a position in Europe which supports the right of developing countries to chose their own economic policies. We hope that all the Irish candidates elected to the European Parliament will continue this good work and ensure that Europe’s trade policy does not contradict its laudable commitment to overseas development.” she added.

Comhlámh echoes the call of Helen Keogh, Chair of the Board of Dochás, the umbrella organisation for development ngos for Ireland to chose representatives in Europe that will use their influence in Brussels to build a Europe that shows solidarity with the world’s poorest people

Notes to the Editor:

14 MEP Candidates, including 6 sitting MEPs, have signed the Comhlámh Trade Justice Pledge.

For full details or more information, see <http://www.comhlamh.org/>. A list of candidates who have signed is below:

Dublin:

Deirdre De Burca - Green Party

Joe Higgins - Independent

Mary Lou McDonald MEP - Sinn Féin

Patricia McKenna - Independent

South:

Kathy Sinnott MEP - Independent

Toireasa Ferris - Sinn Féin

Dan Boyle - Green

North West:

Jim Higgins MEP - Fine Gael

Marian Harkin MEP - Independent

Susan O'Keeffe - Labour

East:

Kathleen Funchion - Sinn Féin

Mairead McGuinness MEP - Fine Gael

Liam Aylward MEP - Fianna Fáil

Nessa Childers - Labour

Comhlámh (pronounced 'co-law-ve', Irish for 'solidarity') is a member and supporter organisation open to anyone interested in social justice, human rights and global development issues. Marking its 34th year in 2009, it connects, informs, educates and campaigns on these matters.

For more information contact:

Fleachta Phelan

Campaigns & Policy Officer

Comhlámh

Ballast House 2nd Floor

Aston Quay

Dublin 2

Tel 087 3276177 / 01 4783490

Email: Fleachta@comhlamh.org