

Children's Rights Alliance

## **PRESS RELEASE**

14 May 2004

**For Immediate Release**

### **Denial of Child Benefit to Asylum Seeker Children Will Force Vulnerable Children into Deeper Poverty**

Citing international human rights law, Government policies and the moral obligation to protect children from extreme poverty, the Children's Rights Alliance today called on the Government to reverse its decision to deny Child Benefit payments to incoming asylum seeker families with children. The draconian policy change, which took effect May 1st, will reduce the income of already-impooverished asylum seekers with children by at least 40% and possibly more than 70%, leaving them with virtually no money to pay for their children's clothing and supplementary food needs and basic day-to-day expenses.

"Because the parents are not allowed to work, Child Benefit payments are the principal financial means of preventing the children of asylum seekers from becoming utterly destitute," said Ray Dooley, Chief Executive of the Alliance. "Research has shown that even with such income, many children are experiencing severe hardship and are failing to have their nutritional and clothing needs addressed. There have been published reports of teachers in North Dublin schools who are already being forced to feed and clothe asylum seeker children who are coming to school hungry or not wearing the school uniform because their parents have no money to buy one.

"Denying Child Benefit assistance to these children represents a flagrant violation of their rights under international human rights treaties, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Ireland has solemnly pledged to uphold. It also directly contravenes all Government policy in the area of child and family support, including the National Children's Strategy and the National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion, by responding to the material needs of an already vulnerable and impoverished group of children by driving them into deeper poverty and social exclusion," said Dooley.

The denial of Child Benefit to incoming asylum seekers has been quietly introduced under the new social welfare legislation imposing an "habitual residence test" designed to restrict access to social welfare by claimants from the new EU Member States. Although not put forward as having any application to asylum seekers who, unlike new EU nationals, will not be allowed work, the legislation is now being used to eliminate the only significant source of income available to asylum seekers, with dire consequences for their children.

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right *“to benefit from social security”* (Article 26) and *“to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development”* (Article 27). The Convention also requires State Parties to *“respect and ensure”* all of the rights set forth in the Convention *“without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parents ...national, ethnic or social origin...”* (Article 2).

The Government’s National Anti Poverty Strategy promises *“to ensure that members of minority groups resident in Ireland are not more likely to experience poverty than majority group members”*. The National Children’s Strategy states, *“children will be provided with the financial supports necessary to eliminate child poverty”*.

The National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005 promises *“to address the poverty/inequality link by emphasising non-discrimination, equality and the accommodation of diversity.”*

The UN Declaration on the Human Rights of Individuals who are not Nationals of the Country in which they Live stipulates the right to social services, health care, education and social housing of aliens lawfully residing in the country.

The National Children’s Strategy also states that a Child Impact Review will be undertaken prior to reaching a government decision on matters relevant to and likely to have an impact on children, and that *“the impact on particularly vulnerable children will be highlighted.”*

The Alliance has written to Minister of Social and Family Affairs Mary Coughlan, TD, urging her to reverse the decision to deny Child Benefit to the children of incoming asylum seekers. “Tomorrow is the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Day International Day of the Family. Ireland should recognise this day by restoring to asylum seeker families their entitlement to Child Benefit payment.”

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of 76 non-governmental organisations concerned with the rights and needs of children. The Alliance works to secure the full implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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