



MEDIA ALERT

European Year ambassadors appointed to 2010 campaign to combat poverty and social exclusion

2010 is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and to support the pan-European communication to raise awareness of the issues and solutions related to the subject, four leading European personalities from politics, development aid, and the arts have been appointed as European Year ambassadors.

The ambassadors have volunteered to act as spokespeople throughout various initiatives developed in the framework of the European Year 2010. In this way, these well-known public figures provide an endorsement and give their own perception of the core messages of the anti-poverty campaign.

The four ambassadors of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion are:

Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (Latvia), a distinguished academic, former President of Latvia, and vice-chair of the reflection group on the long term future of the European Union. Dr. Vīķe-Freiberga is very active in the international arena and is a high profile and strong defender of liberty, equality, and social justice.

Dr. Lesley-Anne Knight (UK), Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, the central co-ordinating hub for a confederation of more than 160 relief, humanitarian, and social aid organisations. Dr. Knight has also worked with the UN High Commission for refugees, OXFAM, and the UK-based charity HelpAge International.

Mr. Michał Piróg (Poland), a well-known Polish modern dance performer, choreographer and TV moderator. Mr. Piróg actively uses his high celebrity profile to increase awareness in Poland and abroad about poverty and social exclusion issues.

Ms. Tasha de Vasconcelos (Portugal/UK), a renowned top model and actress, and founder of AMOR aid foundation helping children and preventing maternal mortality in Africa. In addition to being an active humanitarian aid worker, Ms. de Vasconcelos has been a UNICEF 'Special Campaigner for Children with HIV' and an ambassador for the Institut Pasteur.

The issues of poverty and social exclusion are still highly relevant in the current context. Nearly 84 million citizens in the European Union still live at risk of poverty. Many of them face serious obstacles in accessing employment, education, housing, and social and financial services. This situation is aggravated by the global economic crisis, which has brought serious recession and rising unemployment rates in many countries.



Key objectives which are being supported by the 2010 European Year Ambassadors include: promoting a better understanding of the reality of poverty in the EU today and combating stereotypes as well as re-affirming the importance of individual and collective responsibility in combating poverty.

The ambassadors will give a “face” to the 2010 European Year, highlighting and endorsing its objectives and exemplifying the key messages through their words and actions.

In addition to four pan European ambassadors, more than 130 national ambassadors have been appointed in the countries participating in the European Year 2010.

“I am delighted to see such significant and diverse personalities acting as European Year ambassadors. Their strong personal commitment and active involvement will help strengthening the message that combating poverty is a shared responsibility, where all public, private actors have a role to play. In many countries national ambassadors for the European Year are performing a similar role, giving a face and visibility to the European Year” commented László Andor, European Commissioner responsible for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion.

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For information:

Previous and upcoming participation of EY ambassadors at events in Europe:

- 9 May: Europe Day celebrations, Matosinhos, Portugal
Tasha de Vasconcelos speaks during the opening ceremony
- 9-10 June: International Festival of Local Television, Košice, Slovakia
Michal Pirog participates in a panel and speaks in the opening ceremony
- 18 June: Viva Europa, Valencia, Spain
Tasha de Vasconcelos attends the performance of the opera *Carmen*, performed in Spain and broadcast throughout Europe
- 25 September: Ethical Fashion Show, Paris, France
Tasha de Vasconcelos will actively participate in the programme
- 4 October: LitCam Conference at the Frankfurt Bookfair, Frankfurt, Germany
Dr. Vīķe-Freiberga will speak at the opening of the conference
"Literacy and Human Rights"
- 28-29 October: Riga Festival, Riga, Latvia
Dr. Vīķe-Freiberga will actively participate in the programme
- 17 December: Closing Conference of the European Year, Brussels, Belgium
Dr. Lesley-Anne Knight will actively participate in the programme

Information on national Ambassadors of the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion:

<http://www.2010againstpoverity.eu/ambassadors>



Background: the need for combating poverty and social exclusion

Each year, the European Union selects a theme of general interest aimed at raising public awareness and drawing national governments' attention to the related issues. Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion was chosen as the focus of the 2010 European Year to mark the 10-year Anniversary of the Lisbon Council when Heads of State and government committed to taking steps to make a decisive impact on the levels of poverty.

The social protection systems in the European Union are amongst the most highly-developed in the world and yet too many Europeans still live in poverty. The many forms this takes are complex, but figures speak for themselves:

- More than 84 million people live below the poverty line (set at 60% of their country's median income). This figure represents 17% of Europe's population.
- One European in ten lives in a household where nobody works.
- For 8% of Europeans, having a job is not enough to avoid poverty.
- Some 19 million children live under the threat of poverty and are disproportionately affected.

Objectives of the European Year:

- To recognise the fundamental right of people affected by poverty and social exclusion and to allow them to live in dignity and to take an active part in society;
- To promote public support for social inclusion policies and foster commitment by all public and private actors;
- To promote a more cohesive society, where it is recognised that society as a whole benefits from combating poverty;
- To renew the pledge of the EU and its Member States to combat poverty and social exclusion, and to involve all stakeholders in the pursuit of that aim.

Actions:

Throughout 2010, several hundred activities are being organised, including awareness campaigns, innovative actions, creative solidarity schemes, discussions, conferences, and competitions, which highlight achievements and promote stories related to poverty and social exclusion. In addition, partnerships have been concluded with major event organisers in Europe, such as the Edinburgh International Festival, the Frankfurt Book Fair and the Perugia International Journalism Festival, to highlight just a few.

These European events involve a wide range of actors, including civil society organisations and those defending the interests of persons living in poverty, as well as social partners, and local and regional authorities.

At national level, programmes have been developed for adapting the policy guidelines defined at European level to the issues and specific characteristics of each country and carried out locally. These national programmes are published on the EY2010 website.

For further information please visit www.2010againstopoverty.eu