

Millennium Development Goals

Lobby Group



Brussels

November 10-14 2008

1 World... 8 Goals... U Decide

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*...respect fully and uphold the Universal
Declaration of Human Rights*

Introduction

The MDG campaign project is run by a coalition of three Irish NGOs; 80:20 Educating and Acting for a better world, Self Help Africa and Concern Worldwide.

The purpose of the project is to equip students with the skills, experience and confidence necessary to engage with politicians and other decision makers and in so doing ensure that the promises made by world leaders in the Millennium Development Goals are achieved by 2015

The visit to Brussels was preceded in 2007 by a group of students who campaigned on the Millennium Development Goals at the United Nations in New York

Members of both groups prepared for the trip over a 6 month period which involved a great deal of research, discussion and presentation. While the group was accompanied by the Irish NGOs, all meetings with officials, groups or politicians were chaired and recorded by the students themselves.

Plans are already underway for a new group to bring the MDG campaign to other key centres of influence and power.

Who we are

We are twelve students from six schools who have travelled from Ireland to Brussels to raise much needed awareness about the Millennium Development Goals whilst urging EU leaders and decision makers to keep the promises they have made.

During our stay, we aim to hold leaders accountable by reminding them that we have not forgotten about these vitally important global issues. Also, we strive to make the MDG's an agenda not just for our politicians, but also an agenda for the greater public.

We are part of the second leg of an on-going campaign to highlight these pressing issues to the public simply because we care. We realise that we are the voices of those who live in the developing world, but we are also the voices for our own communities who wish to see these targets met.

Finally, while in Brussels, we also hope to share, unite and empower fellow campaigners and civil society in general on the MDG agenda as together we believe we are stronger and we can achieve great progress on this crucial issue.

Expectations

As a group we expect;

1. to have our opinions heard and to influence MEPs on the seriousness of meeting the MDGs
2. to show MEPs, fellow students, and NGOs that young people really care about the MDG agenda
3. to inspire those we meet to take action to ensure that the MDGs are reached
4. to be taken seriously as ambassadors and student lobbyists
5. to learn how to successfully lobby those with influence and power
6. to return home with positive feedback and to share it with our communities
7. to learn from the opinions, experiences, approaches and discussions that we will have during our visit
8. to forge new friendships with student 'activists' both within our group and in the school we will visit in Brussels
9. to recognise that our visit 'is only the start' and that we will need to continue this work long after the visit ends
10. to have an enjoyable, interesting and memorable experience

Preparation

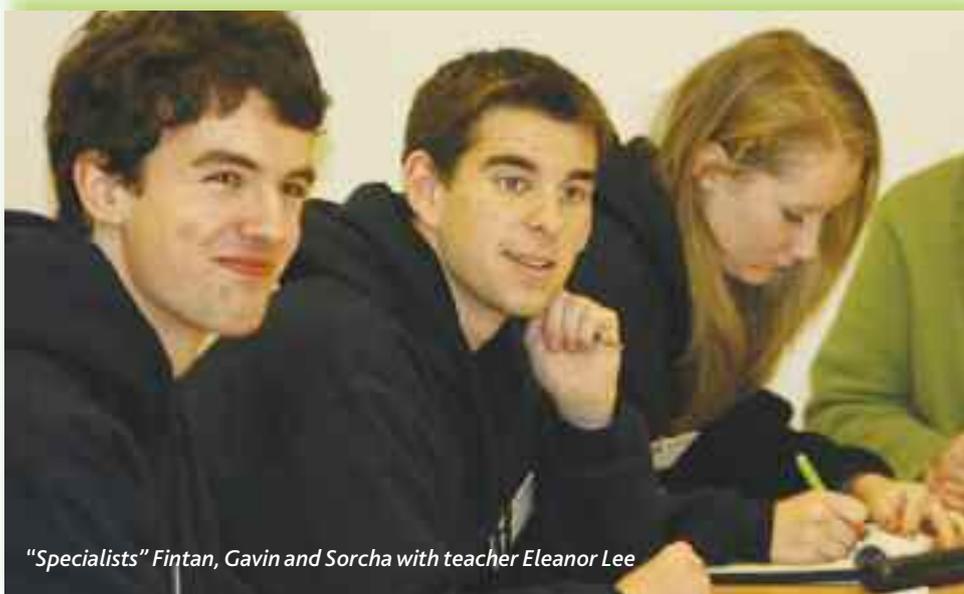
In preparation for the visit to Brussels the group read and discussed the following documents;

1. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007
2. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008
3. MDGs Education Campaign Advocacy Document 2007
4. Irish Aid White Paper; Ireland's Vision for Development
5. Overseas Development Institute Briefing paper 43: The Millennium Development Goals

Specialist Areas

The group agreed that pairs would be assigned to 'specialise' on each of the goals. Each specialist is prepared to present relevant aspects of their goal, including the 'problem', progress to date and action needed to achieve successful completion.

...translate...shared values into action



"Specialists" Fintan, Gavin and Sorcha with teacher Eleanor Lee

MDG Petition

In the weeks prior to departure for Brussels members of the group circulated petition in support of our campaign. The petition begins... *"We the undersigned want no new promises with regards to the MDGs. What we want is action, commitment and leadership..."*

The petition was signed by over 5000 people and presented to MEPs Mairéad McGuinness and Prionsias De Rossa



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Session 1: European External Policy Advisers

On the afternoon of Monday the 10th November, after a mad rush from settling into our hotel, we arrived at the offices of EEPA (European External Policy Advisors), an advocacy lobby group based in Brussels, from whom we hoped to learn a lot about the EU and how to lobby issues. The meeting was chaired by Mrs Joyce Haarbrink, Project Manager. We met with three professional campaigners from Nepal, Kenya and India who helped us develop lobbying skills.

We discussed the Millennium Development Goals with them and in particular MDG 2, which promises that by the year 2015 every child of primary school age will be in school. This goal will not be met though unless all children who are now working as child labourers are given the chance go to school.

The campaign group from Kenya, Nepal and India told us about their 'Stop Child Labour Africa Tour 2008' and how they have visited 5 countries in Africa, meeting with trade unions, politicians and other leaders in an effort to assess the present situation of child labour and education in these countries and how they can get working children into school

...be proactive, be persistent and be available

Mrs Haarbrink gave us a detailed and very informative explanation of how the EU works, explaining the roles of the Parliament, the Commission and the European Council of Ministers. Despite the complexities of the EU she told us that it is more than possible for individuals and groups to have a real impact on policies and programmes. However, she informed us, that if we are to be effective we must 'do our homework' by firstly doing detailed research and being up to date with all of the facts on our particular issue. Secondly we must develop a clear message that we would like to present to MEPs and a timeline when they will deliver their promises, and thirdly, we must remember the 3B's...be proactive, be persistent and be available.



The MDG group meets EEPA staff and the Stop Child Labour "Africa Tour" delegation

Session 2: Concern Advocacy Officer

On Tuesday 12th of November, the second day of our trip to Brussels, was spent in the company of Ms Olive Towey, who is an EU Policy Advisor working with Concern. The meeting was informal in setting (we were huddled in Patsy's hotel room...) yet inspirational in subject.

Ms Towey opened the meeting by introducing herself and explaining how she got involved in lobbying and development. The group of twelve campaigners was asked to follow suit. After the formalities had ceased, Olive spoke of the work of Alliance 2015; the collaboration of six European NGOs (which Concern are a part of) that are working closely together and striving to achieve a world without poverty alongside the fulfillment of the MDGs.

The Alliance 2015 members work in over 80 countries and have hundreds of local partners with whom they implement programmes that contribute to reaching the Millennium Development Goals, namely poverty, hunger, education, gender equality, health, child mortality, HIV and AIDS and the environment. The Alliance members also lobby and advocate for the poor at the EU and with their national governments, they believe that 'together we are stronger', an ethos that is particularly appropriate in a European context.

Ms Towey described the complex workings of the EU and their development policies. She eloquently spoke of the difficulties and obstacles facing aid and development within the EU structures. Ms Towey criticized the EU's aid budget; the EU has stated that it will spend 20% of its budget on health and education. However, this figure is only 4.36%. Furthermore, she was



Olive Towey from Concern in our impromptu meeting room

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critical of how the EU does not evaluate the level of impact its spending is having on the MDGs. This situation, she said, must be quickly redressed if we are to achieve the MDGs.

Throughout the meeting, Ms Towey spoke with great respect of the Irish contribution to development, especially of Gay Mitchell (Fine Gael MEP) and his continuing efforts to redirect unspent EU funds to African farmers, in a bid to combat food shortages and higher prices. In sharp contrast to Italy's decision to cut its aid by 40% Ireland has not altered its aid policy. (Although our aid budget is based on GDP, which has fallen, so therefore our aid budget will fall.)

Ms Towey told us of how NGOs are preparing 'their vision of Europe'. She encouraged us to prepare our own vision for Europe, whether it be filmed, written, drawn or spoken.

Ms Towey concluded her meeting with a short Q&A session before wrapping up the meeting with a short film. Ms Towey strengthened our belief that the work we were doing was important and must continue. She gave us further inspiration and determination.

...abject and dehumanizing conditions...

*...only 4.36% of a promised 20% of EU aid is spent
on Health and Education in the Developing
World*

Session 3: European Parliament Committee Special Hearing on MDG 2 and Child Labour

On Tuesday morning the 11th of November we attended a hearing on the elimination of child labour. On arrival we were treated to a short lunch with the people attending the hearing and then after everyone had settled down the hearing begun.

The delegates were welcomed by Ms Maria Martens who then introduced Ms Jetteke van der Schatte Olivier who gave the attendants an insight into the 'Stop Child Labour Campaign and Africa Tour'. She explained how the campaign is a joint advocacy and education campaign that seeks to eliminate child labour through the provision of full-time, formal and quality education.

The partners, including Concern, work closely within the campaign and with their organisations involved in getting children out of work and into school, aim their advocacy towards the EU, national governments and international organisations, calling on them to formulate coherent policies on the twin issues of child labour and education. From the introduction we learned that there are;

- 218 million child labourers aged 5-17 around the world today
- 1 in 7 children are going to work rather than school

Despite these high figures the fact still remains that children's wages only contribute in a small way to the family's income while at the same time the child is losing out on vital education which will condemn them to a life of poverty



Call to order...the special hearing in session. Photo: Clare Dunne

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Self Help Africa

Other speakers at the hearing included a Dutch parliamentarian, the head of a human rights organisation as well as a number of children's rights activists. From these speakers we learned that Child labour may begin to increase particularly in Africa as families will be affected by the global financial crisis, the present food crisis and environmental changes forcing families to leave their land migrating in search of work and food in the cities

We were also told by Mr Venkat Reddy from India that the Millennium development goals, particularly goal 2, will only be realized if all forms of child labour are eradicated and all children have access to full time quality education. He also stressed how there is a yearning for education from youths and adults despite the differences in culture, political regimes and economic stability. He also found that in all the countries he visited it was the same type of children who were out of school and working. He said it was actually an easier option for a parent to send his/her child to work because there is no need for uniforms, books or legitimate papers.

Then Mr Victor Odera who works with Concern in Kenya gave a presentation where he explained how 60% of people in Nairobi live in slums and the children living in such dwellings are denied an education. This is because an act which was put into place in 2003 stated that that schooling was only accessible through the public school system and that the people living in slums were not part of this system.



Victor Odera from Kenya and friends

Mr Odera told us how the poorest communities (slum dwellers) need to be integrated into the public schooling system. He stressed how the needs of the most vulnerable must be addressed.

Next the Dutch Human Rights Ambassador for Human Rights, Mr Arjan Hamburger spoke on the topic. He told the table how he thinks the EU should place a ban on products that have been produced by the worst type of child labour.

Following this there was a questions and answers session. We then left the hearing and went straight to the international school.

Session 4: Workshop with International School Brussels



Our campaign takes on an international flavour Photo: Patsy Toland

As half of the group was going to the Child Labour Hearing, the rest of us went straight to the school to meet the other students and begin the presentation. After much unintended, but not unwelcome exploration of the city, we met with David Cole, the liaison teacher in the school and head of the school's Self Help committee. We had a good lunch, rivaling any bit of toast and tea we get in our own schools, and were welcomed by the director of the school also. After a quick tour of the school, a huge complex of buildings more at home as a university in Ireland, we met with the students of the Self Help committee, from a wide range of nationalities.

We began by playing a ball throwing game where the lot of us stood in a circle and threw the ball to each other. The person who caught the ball had to give their name, nationality and something about themselves. After everyone had said something, we then played the game

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again, this time each person telling something they knew about the goals. We then played the 19 Steps game, where each person is first given a piece of paper with a role they must play. They then must line up against a wall, and 19 statements are read out. If they can answer yes, they take a step forward, if not, they stay where they are. The statements are designed to question the person's rights and equality. After this we had a short discussion about the game and what the group thought of it.

Still waiting on the other half of the group from the hearing, we decided to begin the presentation. Luckily, the rest of our group turned up a few slides in, and we finished without a problem. Each of us spoke about the goal we had taken on to study in detail, and it was well received. Lastly, we demonstrated the eighth goal, Global Partnership for Development by playing the string game, where 7 people represent each goal and say how each is linked. As each finds a link, the ball of string is passed between them, eventually leading to a large net. If



Clare Dunne lets us know about the problem

someone drops the string they are holding, showing what happens if a goal fails, the whole shape falls. This shows the importance of fulfilling all the goals equally.

To finish the visit, we had a quick evaluation of what the students thought of our presentation. We got very good feedback, which we can now take onboard for if and when we give the presentation to other groups. Lastly, we presented our t-shirts and our lobby document to the committee as a parting gift.

European School Visit: The Return

On Thursday, we went back to the European School, this time not to give a lecture but to be lectured. We were given the chance to sit into some classes and experience some of the subjects the students there learned.



Gavin and Danny 'thinking' about the issues

We were each paired with a student, and had to attend their two classes. Some of us ended up having to study biology in Danish, whereas others had the good fortune of getting to do P.E. It was interesting to see how the classes weren't all that different from our own at home, but it is something to be sitting in an English class being taught as a foreign language. I myself ended up studying History and English. History is taught (quite obviously) with a more European view on the wars and policies, and English was taught quite similar to how Irish is taught here.

It was a fantastic opportunity to see how other students our own age are so alike to us while being so far away. After the two classes, we had to rush off to our meeting with Prionsais de Rossa, but we will always remember the time we spent at the school.

Each of us presented the goal we had studied
in detail...

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Session 5: Meeting with Plan International



On Wednesday the 12th November we had a meeting with Deepali Sood, head of Plan International Belgium, in their offices in Brussels.

Plan is one of the oldest and largest international development agencies in the world, founded over 70 years ago. Plan works in over 50 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas. Plan has a specific focus on children.

The meeting began with an introduction to the group given by Louise. Ms. Sood then asked each member of the group how and why they got involved in the campaign. She was very interested in our motivations for pursuing development and the Millennium Development Goals as a cause. Ms. Sood showed us a detailed power point presentation on the structure of the European Union and its approach to development aid. She discussed the fact the development aid is believed to be a 'soft topic' by some but she stressed how important development aid coming from Europe is as, with 500 million citizens, the European Union is one of the world's biggest donor of aid. The European Commission administers 10% of its monies as overseas development aid (ODA), making the EC the 3rd largest world donor.

We learned about the EUs structure. The European Commission being the proposal making body responsible for drafting bills and implementing aid on behalf of the EU, The European Parliament has co-decision power with MEPs holding seats in the parliament from 27 member states, and we learned that the European Council is the hub of power.

We also learned a lot of interesting points about Plan's advocacy strategies. Ms. Sood told us that it is essential to establish key priorities for your campaign/organization that are backed up by statistics, and that in order for an organization to succeed in achieving its aims, it must become well known in the NGO sector through networking with organizations of similar interest. She explained the importance of finding a niche advocacy issue and finding the technical expertise to try to engage people in this issue. Ms. Sood also discussed the importance of using the media to shed light on development issues.

*"We must use the media to shed light on
development issues..."*

Ms. Sood finished our meeting by answering some of the group's questions about Plan and development aid in general. We learned that 70-80% of Plan's funding comes from donations from individuals, highlighting how important it is that NGOs get sufficient funding from members of the public. We also learned of the need to make development and the MDGs high on the political agenda. Plan finds the MDGs particularly important as 6 out of the 8 goals directly relate to children, which is Plans main area of work.



Ms Sood and the campaigners

Overall we spent a very enjoyable couple of hours at Plan, learning lots and engaging with Ms. Sood, which helped us greatly in understanding the intricacies of the European Union and the process of lobbying.

“development aid is believed to be a soft topic”

they would say of great importance and so a
one of academic research would
thin a relatively short space of time

IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL TO READ IT WAS AS THOUGH

the articles were written in a way

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Session 6: Meeting with Mairead McGuinness



Mairead McGuinness MEP and the Lobby Group in the European Parliament

On Wednesday the 12th of November we had a very insightful and memorable meeting with the Irish Fine Gael MEP Mairéad McGuinness who among many other things serves on the European Parliament's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. She was therefore well able to discuss with us the importance of developing a strong agriculture sector in third world development particularly if we are to meet Millennium Development Goal 1.

Mairéad was the first Member of Parliament we met with in Brussels, where she had organised an official meeting room for us, we had our meeting around a long, impressive looking table which made us all feel very important.

Agriculture

Mairéad told us a lot about the significance of agriculture in our world today. Her background as a presenter on the television show "Ear to the Ground" meant that she is very aware of agriculture in all societies. She talked to us about the farmers in developing countries and how they find it so hard to grow crops.

She emphasised how vital it is to take care of agriculture in the developing world because that is the foundation for having a healthy country. She summed it up very simply, "If we fail to invest in agriculture, we will have hungry people".

The group as a whole admitted that in Ireland farming is widely considered as a 'poor relation' in comparison to other careers and few people realise the important role it plays. Mairéad wisely reminded us that every nation in this world has developed on the foundations of agriculture.

Even Ireland at one stage was completely dependent on farming as its main economic activity. The failure of our crops in part led to the famine. Mairéad emphasised that third world countries desperately need effective agriculture systems in order to develop. Most of us had not actually considered this fact before and hearing it in relation to our own country really drove home the fact that the best way for third world countries to develop is to establish productive agricultural systems.

She also gave us an insight to an Irish farmer's life. Farmers have such a hard time making decisions because they never know how well their crops will grow and how high demand will be. The government and the public often forget about farmers and neglect the subject of agriculture. However, without farmers we would have no food. Mairéad reminded us that we should respect farmers and also other people who grow things. It takes a lot of time and effort to produce healthy crops.

“Overall, our meeting with Mairéad was thoroughly enjoyable and extremely beneficial.”

Mairéad also made a worrying point that EU expenditure on agriculture has decreased significantly since the 1980s. Many richer nations may not be dependent on this economic activity anymore- but developing countries certainly are. Another interesting comment that Mairéad made was that “We shouldn't reject modern technology- for example, GM foods- because our bellies are full”. Ultimately we have become very fussy in the First World, while the people of the south just desperately need food.

Penney's Debate

We also discussed MDG 2 with her and naturally the subject of Child Labour was brought up. She talked about the familiar process of buying clothes from Penneys, the cheap Irish store. Children in the developing countries make these clothes and receive such little wages in return. The clothes are sold to us cheaply, but this small value is more than the children's wages. Mairéad raised the interesting debate; should we not buy in Penneys because it is supporting the cause against bad treatment of the children? Or should we buy it because that way, at least they're getting something?

Mairéad commented that many campaigners in the West see child labour as completely awful and something that must be stopped immediately which she agreed with but said that because of extreme poverty she could understand why children go to work in poor countries, and that for many it was a matter of survival for their families. A member of the group however challenged her on this point by raising the issue of a child's right to education and a decent standard of living as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human rights and the Convention on the rights of the child, and that while it may be necessary at times for a child to bring money into the family they should not be prevented from receiving a full time education (MDG 2), because the only real way out of poverty is through education.

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Rebecca, Sorcha, Clare and Cathy present the MDG petition to Mairéad

Lisbon Treaty

Like all the other people we met with during the week, Mairéad McGuinness commented on the Lisbon Treaty and how the Irish voted no. Mairéad, like the others, was clearly in favour of the Treaty. She explained to us how it would have strengthened EU decision-making and would have also improved and increased ODA which is vital if we are to meet the MDGs.

The problem was, she said, that the Irish people did not understand correctly what the Lisbon Treaty entailed and were too worried that their social and economic prospects would be affected.

Simple ideas are rarely simple

Mairéad and the group discussed activities to improve matters in the developing world and the efficiency of their implementation. Mairéad told us that "Simple ideas are rarely simple". When an idea comes about, we must assess it and analyse its potential downsides, and be aware of them. Mairéad believes it is important to invest in research and training. She said that what we need more of is people who can implement the research on the ground.

Public Agenda

One of the most memorable discussions from our meeting was the public vs. the politicians discussions. Somebody asked her the question, "What more do you think politicians can do to help matters in the developing world?" Confidently and with some frustration, Mairéad answered that she, like others, could do no more. If she tried to do anymore, she would fail to address economic and social matters efficiently, which the Irish people are very concerned about (such as children's allowance and health regulations). If she didn't address these, then she wouldn't be elected again next year and then she could do nothing for the developing world.

Mairéad argued that it is not just up to the politicians, but that matters in the Third World are a public agenda. The public cannot always expect the politicians to do the pushing. We must act as a force and make a difference ourselves. She made the point that we elected the MEPs ourselves, so we should have faith in them. Coming back to the topic of the Lisbon Treaty, this is not what

the Irish public did. Instead, they disagreed with the people they put in power, like Mairéad, and voted against it.

Mother/Journalist/Politician

Not only did we see a powerful politician in Mairéad, but she was many things in one. The mother and journalist in her were most evident. She talked with compassion and understanding for children in the developing world. However she also understood our background and was appreciative of our views. Mairéad has three children herself and was extremely kind, attentive and she enjoyed our company. While we took photos, she fixed everyone's position and appearance for the photo as we witnessed her journalistic side.

An excellent politician, Mairéad knew exactly what she was talking about and her ideas and views were clear. She is a confident, well-informed and very inspiring person. She has seen the reality of developing countries. She talked about her experiences in India and the improvements she had seen there. Local women from each village were being taught about health and maternal care. They would go back to the other women in their village and teach them. This education then circulated and women become more informed about health.

“What more do you think politicians can do to help matters in the developing world?” we asked.

Women in Politics

A very interesting issue that was raised towards the end of the meeting was that of women in politics. Mairéad said she feels “politics puts women off as it demands that you do all that other stuff, whereas women just want to get home”. It is clear however from what we heard that Mairéad is doing a great deal of work.

What should we do?

The group then posed the question as to what actions should be undertaken in order to achieve the goals. Mairéad replied by saying “we need to continue to preach our little message”. It is vital that we continue to endeavour to improve our world no matter how small our actions. In the words of Michael “We are chipping away underneath the iceberg and one day it will topple”. Mairéad also said that people and world powers should not be afraid to take action as sometimes doing the wrong thing and then correcting ourselves is better than doing nothing at all. A very effective phrase that Mairéad shared with us is that “people need to have greater global vision”. This is absolutely true as we all need to consider the bigger picture and not forget about those people on our planet who are suffering.

Success of the EU

Mairéad finished the meeting by praising the success of the European Union. “My God isn't it some achievement that 27 countries can sit around and come to civil compromises – given that it has only been 90 years since World War One”.

Overall our meeting with Mairéad was thoroughly enjoyable and extremely beneficial. I think I speak for everyone when I say that we left the meeting with a great deal of new knowledge and a sense of enthusiasm regarding the future of the EU and world development.

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Session 7: Meeting with Prionsias De Rossa

After a frantic dash from the International School we met with Prionsias De Rossa MEP in the visitors centre at the European Parliament. The first thing we noticed was how busy it was, there were queues of people waiting for their allotted moment to go in and speak to their elected representative. Once in the building itself we passed through the obligatory security check, with bags x-rayed, bodies scanned and hats removed, then we were in directed toward the lift, went up a couple of stories and into a small theatre style room with 30 or so seats, and there waiting for us was Mr. De Rossa.

Given that we were a little late, and that he had another 4 meetings after ours, we got right down to business. We began by stating who we were, what we were doing in Brussels and how we would like to engage with him on the overall MDG agenda.

“For every 1 per cent decline in global growth over 40 million more people are lost to poverty.”

Mr De Rossa replied by putting the challenge of meeting the MDGs in the context of a recent fact finding mission he was on in Palestine. He gave examples of many breaches of basic rights and freedoms including the right to a fair hearing. He said that over 11,000 Palestinians are in jail, 300 of them are between the ages of 12 and 18 and most were forced to sign confessions or had trials in a court appearance that lasted less than 2 minutes. He said that he was deeply committed to putting pressure on the EU to change the Palestinian situation.

Mr De Rossa also spoke of the many other challenges to the MDG's on a global level, he said that over 500,000 women die each year in child birth, that child labour continues to be a serious violation of human rights for over 200 million children and that the gains made in recent years in reducing hunger and poverty were being eroded due to the increase in food prices and the global financial crisis,. For every 1 per cent decline in global growth over 40 million more people are lost to poverty

He stated that one of his worries is that countries will begin to retreat behind their borders and push a protectionist agenda. He said we, Europeans, owe the rest of the world our prosperity and the we must do all that we can to ensure that poorer countries are allowed access to the same advantages and quality of life as we enjoy.

“We, Europeans, owe the rest of the world our prosperity.”



The lobbyists surround Prionsias De Rossa MEP

We asked him about the role of young people in this agenda and he replied by saying how important it is that young people are engaged in politics and that on the one hand it was up to the EU and national governments to make sure they were communicating in a clear and relevant way to young people communicate better to young and that we 'absolutely' have a crucial role to play, not just here in Brussels but perhaps more importantly back home by engaging our TDs in the issues as well. And on that uplifting note we unfortunately had to go...but not before he posed for a picture with us...

“we must communicate in a clear and relevant way with young people”

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It was not of great importance and so a
few of students' brains were
thin a relatively short space of time
IT WAS NOT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE AND IT WAS AS THOUGH
the articles were written in a way

Evaluation

Looking back over our MDG campaign experience, many things spring to mind. Perhaps the greatest thing that jumps to each and every one of our minds is how without doubt, each one of our carefully laid out expectations were fulfilled, much more than any of us could ever have imagined.

This whole opportunity, from our first brainstorming session, right up to when we excitedly boarded an extremely early morning flight to Brussels and upon returning to Dublin, has been an incredible and unforgettable experience for many reasons. One only has to look back at our expectations to feel a small modest sense of accomplishment. We succeeded in educating not only ourselves but also our peers on the importance of the MDGs. We achieved our ultimate goal of being taken seriously by those in positions of influence we met with while in Brussels. We proved, with our hugely successful petition that the general public in Ireland really care about the issues that are discussed within the MDG agenda. But more importantly even than that, it is clear from the phenomenal response our petition got within our schools and local areas, that it matters to the general public of Ireland, that these goals are met within their target dates.

We gained much confidence and many skills whilst debating with each other prior to our trip, with students from the international school in Brussels and finally when debating with established members of the European Parliament, most notably Mairéad McGuinness and Prionsias De Rossa. We learned a great deal regarding the running of such establishments like the European Parliament and we thoroughly enjoyed seeing the breathtakingly beautiful capital of Belgium, Brussels.



On a more personal note, I think every person in the group forged new friendships with young people similar in vision to themselves. We may have recognised that this Brussels campaign is only the start for each of us up a long and difficult mountain, but we are ready for the challenge. For each of us, the Brussels trip certainly served as an inspiration, enabling us to reach further and to encourage others to do so, because together we have the power to affect change.

We have now returned home to Ireland, but this campaign, this journey will undoubtedly stay with us forever. In each one of us, it has succeeded in cultivating the desire for justice in the world. We are thoroughly grateful for being given this incredible chance to prove our skills and help to create a better society for all. And while there was certainly some hard work involved, I believe its safe to say that it was also one of the most memorable, enjoyable and fascinating experiences any of us have had.



Appendix I

The Lobbyists

Danny Gardiner	Coláiste Bríd, Carnew
Collette Fitzgerald	Coláiste Bríd, Carnew
Katie Hall	Coláiste Bríd, Carnew
Clare Dunne	Loreto College, St. Stephen's Green
Cathy McAndrew	Loreto College, St. Stephen's Green
Louise Moore	Sutton Park School, Sutton
Anne Marie O'Driscoll	Sutton Park School, Sutton
Gavin Coleman	St. Mary's Academy, Carlow
Fintan Phelan	St. Mary's Academy, Carlow
Rebecca Dolan	Loreto Secondary School, Balbriggan
Sorcha Forde	Loreto Secondary School, Balbriggan
Cailan O'Connell	Institute of Education

Mentors:

Michael Doorly	Concern Worldwide
Patsy Toland	Self Help Africa
Eleanor Lee	Coláiste Bríd, Carnew

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Appendix II

EU Special Hearing on Child Labour

Co-sponsored by Concern, a Stop Child Labour delegation, which toured five African countries on a fact-finding mission, reported its findings to the European Parliament's development committee in Brussels yesterday.

The committee is responsible for 5.6% of the EU's budget. "This is pure development aid," said Jean Lambert, MEP, who hosted the meeting. "This doesn't take into account emergency relief for war or natural disasters. It's bigger than most member states' budgets."

The delegation was made up of representatives from aid organisations from India, Nepal and Morocco. It visited Africa's sub-Saharan region, as it has the greatest incidence of child labourers – 26.4% of all 5-14 year-olds compared with, for example, 5.1% in Latin America.

During the month-long field trip, the delegation met with trade unions, NGOs, community leaders, school teachers, parents and children, some of whom are as young as three years of age when they begin work; typically, the younger aged ones, are employed in agricultural chores such as fetching water, herding cattle or shepherding. The delegation found that children living in rural areas in Ethiopia, for instance, are mostly unpaid for their work.

As a measure of how deep-seated the problem is in the African region, the delegation remarked that some well-informed citizens – such as government officials, civil servants and educated families – employed children as domestic help, the greatest scourge of child labour exploitation in most countries.

"The parents we encountered want their children to be educated..."

In one of the countries visited, Uganda, a local NGO reported that 25,000 children have been abducted by the so-called Lord's Resistance Army, many of the kidnapped children having been sold to human labour traffickers in neighbouring countries.

In Nairobi, the delegation explained that 65% of the city's population live in slums. In the last 15 years, no new primary schools have been constructed; yet, during this time, the city's population has doubled. Up to 60% of students must find schooling in non-formal schools, which lack funding and regulation.

As a result of the Stop Child Labour delegation's advocacy, reported Concern's Kenyan representative, Victor Odera, the Kenyan government has made a commitment to register and fund these non-formal schools.

"The parents we encountered want their children to be educated," said Venkat Reddy, the delegation's primary spokesperson. "They realise that it is a way out of the poverty trap. The problem is with the market. There is a demand for cheap labour in these countries.

"There are also obstacles. There can be waiting lists of a year for schools. Parents must find school fees, pay for uniforms, and provide birth certificates. In the market for cheap labour, there is no uniform. No certificates are required."

By: Richard Fitzpatrick, Irish Examiner

11/11/08

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