

Afro Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI)

Launch of Development Education Programme “Images and Messages”

For Immediate Release (Friday 10th September 2010)

The Afro-Community Support Organisation of Northern Ireland (ACSONI) today celebrated the launch of its European Commission funded project, entitled “Images and Messages of Africa from an African Perspective”. This programme is a joint initiative between the Africa Centre, Slovenia and the Africa Centre in Dublin. It is aimed at building the capacity of Africans and raising awareness of issues fuelling the migration of Africans to Europe.

As Northern Ireland faces the challenges of an emerging intercultural society, there are pockets of the population which struggle with accepting people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This is reflected in the Police Service of Northern Ireland’s hate crime statistics and recent media broadcasts in Northern Ireland. The lives and wellbeing of people from outside Northern Ireland is affected as a result of bias and prejudice. In the context of the Afro Community Support Organisation’s project, the reinforcement of negative perceptions and the use of colonial and dependency images continues to extensively inform the public’s notion of Africa and its peoples.

The proliferation of images of African people that often depict poverty, economic dependency and starvation, are key factors and drivers to how Africa and Africans are perceived. The message in the images of how Africa and Africans are portrayed contribute to inequality of opportunity, poor race relations, inaccurate stereotypical misconceptions among the Northern Irish public about the Afro-community in Northern Ireland and the African continent in general.

Alfred Abolarin, ACSONI Manager said “Northern Ireland’s cultural and ethnic fabric has undergone major changes following the expansion of the European Union in 2004 and more specifically with the increase in the number of people from the African continent, the Caribbean, people of African descent and mixed heritage now residing in Northern Ireland. In order to promote good inter-ethnic relations and integration, inequalities in whatever shape or form must be challenged. It is important that mutual respect and ‘mutual adaptation’ is understood, embraced and worked through by both the host community and the new Northern Irish immigrant community. ACSONI will continue to work with our stakeholders towards promoting equality, good relations and shared responsibility within the framework of the very promising Cohesion Sharing and Integration programme for government”

Max Zamani, Africa Centre Slovenia said “Africans in Slovenia are faced with issues arising directly from gross misrepresentations in children’s literature and school textbooks as well as constant negative portrayal in the media. In working with our partners in Ireland and Northern Ireland, we came to the realization that the negative perceptions are not unique to Slovenia. Hence, we cherish the partnership we have with the Africa Centre Dublin and ACSONI. Together we’re stronger and more relevant”

Mbemba Jabbi, Africa Centre Dublin said, “Africans living in Ireland have strong experiences of the imbalanced manner in which Africa is portrayed by the media in Ireland and also by development agencies and this is not unique to Ireland, but the wider Europe. Both these groups regularly resort to stereotypical images and messages portraying Africans as dependent and lacking in innovation. While some of the messages are true, they are not balanced with messages of the richness of African

culture, portraits of African people who manage to cope under very difficult conditions. Although the Dóchas code of conduct on images and messages has been committed to by media groups and development organisations in Ireland, regularly this code is not observed in the rush to produce newspapers and programmes and to raise funds. This indignation experienced by African people is the motivating factor for this three year funding for Africa Centre Dublin, ACSONI and African Centre Slovenia members to work to rebalance these misrepresentations”

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Notes for Editor: The Afro-Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI) was formed in July 2003 as an independent community-based organization. The Afro-Community is one of the largest Minority Ethnic Communities in Northern Ireland (1126 people, 2001 Census, today is estimated in excess of 6,000) information on the life and experiences of African, Caribbean and other Afro-descendants in Northern Ireland is virtually non-existent.

ACSONI became a registered charity on the 17th of February 2004 and has formal representation on forums and statutory panels in Northern Ireland to give a voice to African, Caribbean and people of Mixed Heritage Nationalities of African background in Northern Ireland.

Media Contact: Dr Christopher Stange - ACSONI Public Relations Officer.
E-mail: consul@svgconsulate.co.uk Telephone: 028 9187 4697 Mobile: 07803 897 487