



**Speaking notes for Katharine Bulbulia, Chair of the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, on the attendance of the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, to mark the transition of the Agency into the HSE; November 26, 2009**

Good morning and thank you all for attending this very significant occasion. I would like to extend special thanks to the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, for her attendance.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency is eight years old and was established with all-party support, as the State's response to decades of debate around crisis pregnancy. For generations, Irish women and men were forced to deal with crisis pregnancies with little support, as the issue was not openly discussed and often considered shameful. The support of the political establishment was and still is, vital to raising awareness of the issue of crisis pregnancy and ensuring that we, as a society, address the issue in a holistic way, identifying causes, taking positive action and offering supports.

The Agency's work is guided by three core principles – we seek to empower, to be non-judgmental and to be authoritative. The woman experiencing crisis pregnancy is always at the centre of our focus. Her partner and family are also a focal point.

Research has identified that today, for young women in their 20s - over half of them with experience of pregnancy, will say they have had a crisis pregnancy.

The Agency has three aims.

- Firstly, to achieve a reduction in the number of crisis pregnancies by the provision of education, advice and contraceptive services.
- Secondly, to bring about a reduction in the number of women with crisis pregnancies who opt for abortion by offering services and supports which make other options more attractive.
- And thirdly to provide support after crisis pregnancy.

The work of the agency has been guided by the development of two national strategic plans.

The first aim, to reduce the number of crisis pregnancies, is addressed through a wide variety of initiatives. Significant partnerships between the Agency and the Department of Education and Science and the HSE has led to the implementation of relationships and sexuality education in schools, the provision of supports for parents to provide relationships and sex education in the home and the development of the Agency's award winning 'Think Contraception' campaign.

The Agency has brought about significant improvements in the provision of crisis pregnancy counselling nationwide. Free, trustworthy, non-judgemental counselling is now available at over 50 locations around the country. The Positive Options campaign, which promoted all State-funded crisis pregnancy counselling has responded to over half a million text requests since 2003 and approximately 255,000 visits have been made to the Positive Options website.

The Agency has always placed a particular focus on its third aim which is to provide counselling and medical supports after crisis pregnancy. As a consequence free post abortion medical and counselling services are available throughout the country.

Since 2001 there has been a decrease of 30% in the number of women, and 43% in the number of teenagers, travelling from Ireland to the UK for an abortion. This has been accompanied by a 21% decrease in the number of births to teenagers over the same period.

This work has been made possible by the support, guidance and assistance of the Department of Health and Children. I would also like to recognise the work of the current and past board members and members of the consultative committee. People like Olive Braiden, the Crisis Pregnancy Agency's first chairperson, have helped to bring the organisation to the level it's at today.

As Chair of this organisation, I am continually impressed by the level of dedication, compassion, energy, and focus that the Director and staff of the Agency deliver. I would like to thank them for their hard work and commitment.

Now the Agency is entering a new phase through its merger, in 2010, with the HSE. Addressing the issue of crisis pregnancy requires no less focus now than it did in the early part of the decade. All parties involved in the merger intend to ensure that the work undertaken to date, either directly by the Agency or through the many frontline services, continues.

I am pleased to note that the Agency will be situated within the new Integrated Services Directorate of the HSE as a national programme.

You are the people who have assisted and supported the vitally important activities of the Agency over the years. We now enter an era of change where the Agency's work will continue in a different guise but must continue nonetheless. Responding effectively to the evolving needs of a changing society will require a concerted focus on research, service development, communications, partnership and evaluation, placing the Agency and its partners in a solid position to respond to the issue into the future.

Just before I conclude I would like to extend our appreciation to the Chairman of the Board of Governors and Guardians of the National Gallery of Ireland, Mr Lochlann Quinn and the Director Mr Raymond Keaveney, and the staff who have facilitated us so greatly for this special occasion.

Thank you, and I now invite President McAleese to speak.