

Fairtrade Conference Aimed at African, Caribbean and Pacific States

January 20, 2010

Belfast, NORTHERN IRELAND: Belfast City Hall had its first ever international Fairtrade conference, hosted by Fairtrade Belfast and sponsored by the European Commission and Belfast City Council.

The purpose of the conference is to raise the profile and awareness of Fairtrade as a mechanism for delivering improved prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, market access, and fair terms of trade for farmers in the developing world, particularly Africa and the Caribbean.

Invited guests included politicians, local authorities, government departments and other relevant stakeholders, with the objective of establishing local Fairtrade Groups, working towards Fairtrade accreditation and to identify best practice models for Fairtrade procurement.

Northern Ireland's government commitment towards the principles of Fairtrade has already been articulated within the 2006 Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland by The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).

Guest speakers included representatives from the European Commission, UK Fairtrade Foundation, Fairtrade Mark Ireland, Bristol City Council, Belfast City Council, Co-operative, Consulate of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Oxfam Ireland, Java Republic and the Sustainable Development Commission.



L - R: Dr Christopher Stange - Chair of Fairtrade Belfast and Hon. Consul of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, The Rt. Hon. Lord Mayor of Belfast - Cllr. Naomi Long, Maurice Maxwell - European Commission, Gillian Hannah – Co-operative

The Rt. Hon Lord Mayor of Belfast, Cllr. Naomi Long recognised the work of Fairtrade Belfast explaining in 2005 Belfast was awarded its first Fairtrade City accreditation by the UK Fairtrade Foundation and then again in 2006, when Belfast was awarded its second Fairtrade City accreditation by Fairtrade Mark Ireland. Belfast is the only city to hold this dual accreditation accolade in the UK and Ireland.

Maurice Maxwell from the European Commission Office in Belfast said: "The European Commission, as the world's largest trader and aid donor, is a firm believer in free trade based on fair trade principles. The EU believes that initiatives such as the Fairtrade movement are welcome supplements to these policies and is very happy to co-sponsor today's conference."

Chair of Fairtrade Belfast and Hon. Consul of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in Northern Ireland, Dr Christopher Stange provided a case study on the impact of free trade and the long standing disputes at the World Trade Organisation on the banana industry in the Windward Islands. He explained that only with the conversion to Fairtrade, has it been possible to keep in the market.

"Today is about bringing all stakeholders together to look at not only a unified approach to best practices and procurement across central and local authorities, but the issue of adequate development funding required by the most vulnerable developing world farmers as they transition to stiffer competition and Economic Partnership Agreements."

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