

Statement by Mr Micheál Martin, T.D., Minister for Foreign Affairs on the publication of the Progress Report on the Global Irish Economic Forum

8 March 2010

I am pleased today to publish a comprehensive progress report on the steps already taken to implement the proposals made at the Global Irish Economic Forum, held at Farmleigh on the 18 -20 September 2009. The full text of the Report is available on the home page of the Department of Foreign Affairs website- www.dfa.ie

In my closing address to the Forum, I made clear that the proposals put forward across a range of sectors would be followed up in detail by the Government. I am now delivering on that promise.

I assured participants that the extraordinary release of energy, knowledge and determination that was the hallmark of the Forum would not be wasted. Today's report shows that this has been achieved.

The Government moved quickly to make good on this commitment and, on 13 October 2009, published a comprehensive overall report of proceedings at the Forum prepared by my Department.

The Government also decided to establish a new inter-Departmental Committee of senior officials to consider and take forward the range of initiatives identified at Farmleigh.

At its meeting on 23 February, the Government considered a detailed Progress Report prepared by this Committee and welcomed the significant success already achieved on the two key original objectives of the Forum: to explore how the Irish at home and abroad, and those with a strong interest in Ireland, could work together and contribute to our overall efforts at economic recovery; and to examine ways in which Ireland and its global community could develop a more strategic relationship with each other, particularly in the economic sector.

The Progress Report summarises the specific areas under thematic headings where substantial progress is being achieved as part of the follow up process. This includes specific projects in the areas of: economic policy; engagement with the Diaspora; culture; innovation; tourism; greentech; international financial services; and agriculture and food. All of the initiatives were proposed or discussed at the Forum and featured in the subsequent Report. Some of the initiatives are of a nature that they are more effectively progressed by the private sector and this is reflected in the Progress Report.

It is important to emphasise that the broad economic policy and call for leadership advocated by many participants at the Forum was reflected significantly in Budget 2010. The high priority contained in the Budget to encouraging innovation, maintaining Ireland as a friendly and supportive environment for international business, and highlighting emerging strengths in areas such as renewable energy, green technology, scientific research and innovation, all reflect the concerns and views put forward by those present at Farmleigh. An aggressive effort has been made by the Government to highlight these actions to the international business community and media and this will be intensified further during St Patrick's Day visits abroad by Government Ministers.

While the Forum was primarily aimed at developing a new and more strategic level of engagement with the most influential members of the Irish Diaspora, the wide range of themes and ideas generated there have complemented the work of the Innovation Task Force and the implementation of *Building Ireland's Smart Economy*.

I am encouraged by the fact that the deep level of engagement and support shown by participants at Farmleigh has been reinforced in their contacts over recent months with the Government. The Forum has come to be widely regarded as marking a new phase of active and practical engagement with our overseas communities, particularly in the business sector.

The recently established Global Irish Network will act as a key channel of communication with our leading Irish business contacts abroad and will, for the first time, integrate the most influential Irish and Irish connected individuals into one

global group. The first in a series of regional meetings of the Network took place in London on 4 February and others will follow during the coming year.

The wide range of areas outlined in this report where action is being taken clearly demonstrates the Government's firm commitment to advance the work begun at Farmleigh, albeit in the context of the continued challenges facing our public finances. It is intended that a further public statement on the progress being achieved in implementing these initiatives and other aspects of the agenda identified at the Global Irish Economic Forum will be made later in 2010.

While the follow up process to the Forum has a strong focus on the business sector, the Government remains equally committed to supporting the wider Irish community throughout the world, particularly the vulnerable and elderly. Over the past six years, some €70 million has been provided under the Emigrant Support Programme towards projects aimed at supporting the Irish abroad, especially those most in need. This commitment to supporting and developing all Irish communities abroad will continue.

I would urge people to read the attached report.

ENDS