

Public Hearing on Poverty 2016

--- Press Release

On 25 May 2016, the newly elected Members of Parliament who took their mandates in the March parliamentary elections were introduced to the activities of the Slovak Anti Poverty Network (SAPN). As one of the largest networks in Slovakia, the organization comprises 154 socially engaged non-governmental organizations representing more than 250,000 members. These organizations share the aim of protecting human dignity in all aspects of life and preventing the alienation of social classes, political apathy, social polarization and the erosion of social cohesion. This timely and important Public Hearing was held under the auspices of Lucia Nicholsonová, Deputy Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.



Dr Anna Galovičová, Chairman and Executive Coordinator for the European Anti Poverty Network, who is also Founder and Chairman of the Slovak-Indian Friendship Society and Ambassador of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Slovakia, welcomed all the esteemed guests who were present including several Members of Parliament, Mr Anton Marcinčin, government envoy for the poorest regions, Dr Kollárová from the office of the envoy for the Roma communities, Mr Jozef Reinart, counsellor of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Ms Barbara Tiefenbacher of the sponsoring Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, as well as numerous NGO representatives. She then read out a letter by Hon. Ján Figel', EU Special Envoy for Religious Freedom in the World, who encouraged the participants to step up their efforts in the service of human dignity and the unity of the human family, drawing on difference as a strength rather than as a weakness. "Dialogue in Slovakia is much needed to overcome fear and apathy toward the innocent who are suffering and prosecuted," Mr Figel' argued, "but also to overcome populism and extremism in politics and the tabloidization of public opinion."

For more than 13 years, the Slovak Anti Poverty Network has sought to assist people start a dignified life, progressively shed helplessness, change things, regain the courage and optimism needed for fighting difficult living conditions, and integrate into society. The target groups have included:

- a) Single mothers with children
- b) Poor workers
- c) Caretakers for handicapped family members
- d) Young unemployed
- e) Handicapped
- f) Inhabitants of marginalized villages/regions
- g) Seniors with difficult access to services

The Public Hearing addressed all topics listed above. The MPs heard real life stories and experiences from regions and areas across Slovakia. They reacted to all questions from the auditorium.

Dr Slávka Mareková, member of the EAPN task force, presented recommendations for eliminating poverty in Slovakia. Mária Tomanová highlighted the need for revising the Labor Code to prevent pressures on the employees to work under disadvantageous conditions. She also pointed out that massive tax evasion siphones off money that is urgently needed to address the drift into poverty of professions such as teachers or nurses. Dušan Plaček, engaged in helping the Roma, argued that Slovakia's NGOs, long overlooked, should be funded from public budgets as they have for too long covered the absence of the state from the social agenda. Eva Schnitzelová from the Košice Regional Office of Public Health argued for a better prevention in anti-drug policies, e.g. by improving interpersonal relations, thereby preventing the emergence of a lost generation. Ľubica Gáliková, President of the Forum for Assisting Seniors, said her organization introduced a toll-free number for helping seniors in need. Ladislav Oravec from the Milan Šimečka Foundation provided a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon of poverty in Slovakia as well as some shocking facts: 5,7% of the population scratch out a living! 18,4% are completely dependent on others' help!



Conclusions

(as presented by Dr Anna Galovičová)

- Poverty results from a moral crisis but also from prioritizing economics over social policies, culture and education.
- The disparity between the rich and the poor can be reduced by accelerating the spiritual development of society, underpinned by lifelong learning, with the view of changing the prevailing paradigm. The new approach must favor win-win approaches over zero-sum thinking. The increasing resentment against the EU and rising extremism have common roots in people's long-term dissatisfaction with politicians whose only focus are economic and material priorities while nature and man are being neglected.
- Best practices must be exchanged at local, national and international level.
- Networking and cooperation with like-minded human rights and social justice-oriented organizations is essential.