

Press Release

10th December 2009

10th anniversary of SPIRASI, specialist agency in the care of torture-survivors

Set up by the Spiritan congregation in 1999 as its asylum-seeker initiative, **SPIRASI:**

- **has offered specialist services to some 3,000 survivors of torture;**
- **has assisted over 22,000 of those who have sought refuge in Ireland in the last 10 years, providing health information and promotion programmes as well as education and cultural integration services;**
- **operates a counselling and support service in Mosney, the State's largest accommodation centre for asylum-seekers.**

Marking the agency's 10th anniversary at an event in its Dublin offices this morning, coinciding with International Human Rights Day, its **chairperson, John Crowe, highlighted "the centrality of HSE support to the ongoing provision of SPIRASI's services which are essential to a particularly vulnerable group"**. He noted the contribution made by the Spiritan congregation, the impressive expertise and professionalism of SPIRASI staff and volunteers, the welcoming and non-threatening environment that is offered to clients and the many specialist services that are made available. He went on to say that: "To date the focus and commitment of SPIRASI has been on maintaining the highest professional standards in the services being provided to very vulnerable people and on trying to bring these services to the many people referred by health professionals."

Noeline Blackwell, Director General of the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC) said that: **"Refugee rights are rights of last resort, only accessible when all rights in a person's home state have been exhausted. They are rights, therefore, which receiving states should address with great respect for the dignity and trauma suffered by people who – to qualify – must have been persecuted by their home state."** She quoted the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish: "Where should we go after the last frontiers? Where should the birds fly after the last sky?"

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See also www.spirasi.ie;