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MINISTER AND DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM
AN OIFIG PHREASA AGUS EOLAIS
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**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform announces that
Asylum seekers will be dispersed throughout the country**

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, John O'Donoghue T.D., has announced that the Government at its meeting today decided that he should complete plans for the introduction of a scheme of direct provision - as distinct from a totally cash-based system - to meet the principal needs of asylum seekers.

In order to give effect to this, the Government also decided that the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform should chair the existing Inter-Departmental Committee on Immigration, Asylum and Related Issues. This Committee comprising representatives of Departments/Agencies which are involved in the provision of basic services such as housing, social welfare payments, health services etc., to asylum seekers, will work immediately on identifying the measures that would need to be put in place by the appropriate Departments/Agencies in order to produce an effective and properly co-ordinated system of direct provision so as to meet the needs of asylum seekers.

The Government has also decided that in the meantime due to the very large increase in the numbers of persons seeking asylum in recent months and in view of the non-availability of accommodation in the Dublin area, it has no option but to make arrangements for accommodating significant numbers of asylum seekers throughout the country.

To this end, local authorities and health boards will be approached immediately to co-operate fully in sourcing suitable accommodation and the provision of the ancillary welfare and health needs of asylum seekers. The Government has also decided that in order to facilitate the sourcing of the additional accommodation as quickly as possible, advertisements will be placed in the national newspapers seeking offers of accommodation for asylum seekers.

Commenting the Minister said "we are faced here with a complex set of tasks and obligations which are literally without precedent in the history of this State.

On the one hand we have the moral and humanitarian duty to meet the needs of those genuinely fleeing persecution and in doing so to meet the highest international standards. On the other hand we have a duty, recognised and implemented internationally, to ensure the State does not become the object of large-scale fraud planned and executed by internationally organised criminal gangs. Failure to do this will serve nobody's interests, least of all those of genuine refugees.

I am confident that by co-ordinating and pooling the resources of all the agencies and Departments involved - which is the purpose of the Inter-Departmental Committee - we will discharge the onerous duties that now face us in a caring and realistic way".

19 October, 1999.