

PRESS RELEASE

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WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP REPRESENT AT FIRST WOMEN'S AMBASSADOR FORUM

Leading campaigners Gina Miller & Shola Mos-Shogbamimu to address first Women's Ambassador Forum at Parliament Buildings, Belfast.

At a time of great political change right across the globe, it is more important than ever that we see increased participation of women at the frontline of political, community, business and civic life - that was the message today as 120 guests gathered in Parliament Buildings to hear from some of the most high profile women leaders at REPRESENT, the first Women's Ambassador Forum organised by Politics Plus for the EU PEACE IV funded The Next Chapter programme.

The forum heard from inspiring women in leadership roles across the community, business and political sphere, including businesswomen and transparency campaigner, Gina Miller, lawyer and Political & Women's Rights Activist, Shola Mos-Shogbamimu, and Alison Cowzer, founder of East Coast Bakehouse. Also participating were Angela McGowan, NI Director of CBI, and Judith Gillespie CBE, Former PSNI Deputy Chief Constable.

REPRESENT is the latest Ambassador Forum to be organised by Politics Plus, and is part of The Next Chapter's civic empowerment programme for women across Northern Ireland and the border counties. The Next Chapter aims to help women to take the next step into public and civic life through training programmes, networking events and mentoring. It is funded through the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

The Next Chapter was launched in March, and had over 1000 registrations of interest. Ten Chapter hubs have been launched, and following the REPRESENT Women's Ambassador's Forum, they will embark on a training programme to develop ideas, build communities and support the transition out of conflict.



Speaking at the event, Joanne Jennings, Head of Programmes at Politics Plus, said: **“This year marks 100 years since the extension of the voting franchise to women. While there has been progress in the role that women play in public life, we are still underrepresented in public and political life. The aim of The Next Chapter is to give women the tools they need to become more involved in civic life.**

“We are delighted to welcome this unrivalled programme of speakers for REPRESENT, the first Women’s Ambassador Forum. These women represent all walks of life, and have accomplished so much in improving local communities, empowering others, challenging stereotypes and orthodoxies, and stepping forward to show leadership. With speakers from across Northern Ireland, Ireland and the UK, this was an exceptional opportunity to hear some of the most inspiring speakers and activists on these islands.”

Highlighting the significance of the project Gina McIntyre, CEO of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), said: **“The region suffers from a real gender imbalance and under-representation of women who are engaged in community, public and political life. This project will establish a network of cross-border ‘chapter hubs’ to facilitate the sharing and development of ideas that will enable women to take a more active role in civic life.**

“It offers participants an opportunity to learn more about peace and reconciliation and equips them with the leadership and communications skills needed to make a real difference within their local community. This will lead to the creation of a more level playing field in which the voices of women can be more clearly heard so that they can effect positive change in a society still emerging from conflict.”

Also participating in REPRESENT were Eileen Weir, Shankill Women’s Centre; Jaqueline Irwin, Northern Ireland Community Relations Council; Ursula McKenna, Dochas for Women NCCWN. On the political panel were Professor Yvonne Galligan, Niamh Smyth TD, Carla Lockhart MLA and Megan Fearon MLA.

Match-funding for The Next Chapter project is provided by the Executive Office in Northern Ireland and the Department of Rural and Community Development in Ireland.



REPRESENT was supported by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and more information on The Next Chapter can be found at www.thenextchapter.eu.

- **ENDS**

Notes to Editor:

About the Next Chapter

The Next Chapter is powered by Politics Plus in conjunction with Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), Irish Rural Link and supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), *The Next Chapter* will run a series of training, coaching, mentoring and empowering programmes for women living and working in towns, cities and rural areas across Northern Ireland and border counties in the Republic of Ireland. Match funding for the project has been provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development in Ireland and the Executive Office in Northern Ireland.

The Next Chapter has established ten chapter hubs across Northern Ireland and border counties of the Republic of Ireland, through which skills development will be provided. As well as training in communication, conflict management and resolution, accessing power and influencing decision making, presentation skills and media engagement, participants will also work with at least one political or local representative who will provide additional support and guidance. Participants will also receive help in identifying how they can positively deliver change in their own areas.

SEUPB

- The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland.
- It is responsible for managing two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.



- The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.
- The PEACE IV Programme has a value of €270 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders.
- For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu