

Divisions emerge over calls for civic reception for 'Good Samaritan' Treasa Ní Cheannabháin

BY KERNAN ANDREWS

Political divisions are emerging over calls for a civic reception for Treasa Ní Cheannabháin for her work for Palestinian hospitals and orphanages. Ms Ní Cheannabháin, who spent last week in Egyptian custody, has been simultaneously described as a "Good Samaritan" and as someone who acted recklessly in the face of Government warnings.

The Galway Alliance Against War has called on the Galway City Council to give Ms Ní Cheannabháin a civic reception to recognise her commitment to the welfare of others in the face of personal danger.

According to group spokesman Niall Farrell, when the Israeli blockade of Gaza "was foiled by Hamas blowing up part of the border wall with Egypt", Ms Ní Cheannabháin "saw an opportunity to bring much needed financial support to hospitals and orphanages in that beleaguered part of Palestine".

Ms Ní Cheannabháin, her daughter Naisrín Elsafty, and niece Sehan Elhotty went to great lengths to reach Gaza and dispense the €8,000 raised in Ireland for Gaza.

In order to get into Gaza they had to disguise

themselves as Arab women in black clothing from head to toe and take a taxi from Cairo using the unofficial roads to the border.

They were stopped at official and unofficial roadblocks, but eventually arrived at the border and climbed over a border fence into Gaza. However they were refused entry back into Egypt, but it emerged this week that they have been released.

Farrell has called Ms Ní Cheannabháin and Ms Elsafty "Good Samaritans" and said they had shown real bravery in trying to bring financial support to hospitals and orphanages.

However Fianna Fáil Cllr Michael J Crowe is opposed to the idea, saying it is "not appropriate" as Ms Ní Cheannabháin "entered the region after ignoring advice" given by Minister for Foreign Affairs Dermot Ahern.

"This lady and her daughter should not have entered the area and chose to ignore the warnings from the Department," he said. "They knew full well what they were getting in to. A civic reception for this kind of behaviour is in my view not right and is unacceptable. There are much more appropriate causes than this."



Athenry's Sandra Coffey, who worked as a journalist in the Galway Advertiser in 2003, recently got a taste of the music business when she recorded a song for Seoige & O'Shea. Sandra appeared on Seoige & O'Shea recently to take part in the show's 'Do I Dare' challenge to record a song. She teamed up with songwriter, broadcaster, and Eurovision winner Paul Harrington to record 'Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again' from Phantom Of The Opera, in Windmill Lane Studios, Dublin - where U2 have recorded numerous albums.

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Calls to WestDoc up by 20 per cent last year

Last year saw a 20 per cent increase in the number of calls to WestDoc compared to 2006, with the number of calls totalling 72,651, according to figures released this week by the HSE.

According to WestDoc the increase can be attributed to the inclusion of additional GPs in the scheme, along with a population increase in the WestDoc area, which comprises counties Galway, Mayo, and

Roscommon. "Eighteen additional doctors joined WestDoc in 2007 from the general areas of Headford, Knockdoe, Ballaghaderreen, Belmullet, and Achill Island," said WestDoc manager Siobhan O'Sullivan. "This, together with the full year effect of the 12 doctors in the Westport cell who joined WestDoc in November 2006, would have contributed significantly to this increase in

numbers."

Ms O'Sullivan said that general population increases as well as an increase in non-urgent calls has also impacted on WestDoc's workload. She expressed concern that at peak activity times non-urgent calls could be making it difficult for urgent patients to access the WestDoc LoCall phone number.

"Westdoc's primary concern is to provide emergency and urgent GP care to patients of participating GPs who become ill outside of regular surgery hours," said WestDoc clinical director Dr Greg Kelly. "It is critical that these patients can access the WestDoc service promptly."

The Christmas period, traditionally WestDoc's busiest time of year, saw an increase in calls of between 20 per cent and 25 per cent over 2006 on St Stephen's Day and the weekends before and after Christmas. The volume of calls was more than double the norm during many morning and early afternoon hours.

There are now 138 participating GPs in the WestDoc co-operative.

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