



FEANTSA

European Federation of National Organisations Working With the Homeless

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For Immediate Release**

FEANTSA Condemns Online Homelessness Game

15 September 2009:

FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless is an umbrella of not-for-profit organisations which participate in or contribute to the fight against homelessness in Europe. It is the only major European network that focuses on homelessness at the European level.

“Dossiergame” is an increasingly popular and widespread online game created by online games company Farbflut Entertainment GmbH. Players are invited to play a homeless character and progress from living on the streets to living in a castle. They can achieve this through a variety of activities including collecting rubbish, stealing, gang fighting, begging, busking and pet fighting. Players also have to keep up a certain blood alcohol level to be a “proper dossier”. According to the game’s creators, it has more than 2.2 million players. There are currently versions set in Hamburg, Berlin, London, Warsaw and Paris under the names Pennergame, Dossiergame, Menelgame, Clodogame, Mendigogame.

FEANTSA deplores the way the game perpetuates negative stereotypes about homeless people including those relating to alcohol, violence and criminal behaviour. Such stereotyping can lead to further stigmatisation, discrimination and exclusion of homeless people.

FEANTSA’s director Freek Spinnewijn has made the following response to the game:

“This game undermines the dignity of people experiencing homelessness and oversimplifies a complex social reality. Justifying this misrepresentation as ‘satire’ is a flimsy defence that is absolutely unacceptable when it comes to the depiction of very vulnerable groups in society. Such deliberate stereotyping undermines efforts to rise to the challenge of ending homelessness”.

The makers of the game consider that it is unsuitable for people under 14, who may not be able to grasp its satirical nature. FEANTSA interpret this stance as a tokenistic proviso, aimed at dodging criticism about perpetuating stereotypes by implying that players over 14 will somehow be immune to the effects of stereotyping. Attitudes of indifference, fear, hostility and violence towards homeless people are prevalent. These attitudes have real consequences, including violent assault and death. In light of this context, a game that centres on negative stereotypical depictions of homeless people cannot be framed as harmless fun.

FEANTSA considers that PR exercises such as donating part of the considerable profits from the game to a homeless organisation in Hamburg or cooperating with online charity platform betterplace.org do little to make up for actively maintaining stereotypes of very vulnerable groups for profit. Furthermore, FEANTSA takes the view that to accuse critics of not understanding the game’s irony is a simplistic way of avoiding responsibility for its content. Farbflut have reacted to negative press, including criticism from homeless organisations, the French Red Cross and France’s State Secretary for Housing and Urbanisation, Benoît Apparou in precisely this way in order to capitalise on exposure without taking due responsibility for the valid criticisms raised.

For further details, please contact FEANTSA’s communications officer Ruth Owen, at
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