

Dochas Submission to the Irish Aid in advance of UNGASS

26th May 2006

'We must face up to why the HIV and AIDS response is failing.'

Dochas welcomes the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV&AIDS (UNGASS) 2006 review as presenting a unique opportunity for the international community to re-engage constructively in the fight against HIV and AIDS. This important session allows governments to affirm progress made in the global HIV and AIDS response since 2001 and - more critically - to strengthen, reinvigorate and scale up international action in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

The Irish government, through its Irish Aid programme, has demonstrated strong leadership in tackling the destructive impacts of HIV and AIDS in the developing world. In particular, the doubling of funding in 2005 towards HIV and AIDS work and the strong poverty focus within the Irish Aid programme, make the HIV and AIDS work supported by the Irish government overseas particularly distinctive.

Dochas is joining civil society actors from around the world in expressing profound concern at the content of the current draft Political Declaration (May 19) being prepared for UNGASS 2006. We are dismayed that the current draft Political Declaration fails to provide a clear framework for future action that breaks with a 'business-as-usual' approach to HIV and AIDS.

We call for a political declaration which concretely addresses the barriers to progress in the HIV and AIDS response as outlined in the UN Secretary General's report:

- **We strongly urge the Irish government to continue to show leadership at UNGASS by advocating for clear, up-scaled and time-bound commitments which address current barriers to reversing the spread of HIV and the provision of treatment care and support to those infected and affected.**
- **We call on the government to ensure that increased, accelerated and time-bound financial investment targets for donor countries are incorporated into the Declaration of Commitment document with strong accountability mechanisms for delivery.**
- **We urge the Irish government to play a leading role at UNGASS in ensuring that resources and strategies for mainstreaming HIV and AIDS concerns across development and humanitarian programmes, and policy processes, are included centrally in the UNGASS Political Declaration document 2006.**

At a domestic level, we furthermore call on the Irish government to put practical measures in place to strengthen our response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic:

1. Poverty-Focus and Emphasis on People Infected and Affected by HIV and AIDS

The Irish Aid programme has long been praised internationally and domestically for its strong poverty-focus. We welcome this focus, and encourage the government to ensure that a focus on the poorest who are infected *and* affected by HIV and AIDS is at the heart of Ireland's aid efforts, both in bi-lateral aid programmes and in its support to NGOs.

We urge the government to prioritise funding for networks and organisations of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA). Their voices are often marginalised in the global HIV and AIDS response.

2. Building the Capacity to Fight HIV&AIDS

We are concerned by the current human resource constraints in Irish Aid regarding implementing a HIV and AIDS mainstreaming agenda. We believe that the proposed relocation of Irish Aid will negatively impact on Irish Aid capacity in this regard.

- **We urge the government to reverse the proposal to relocate Irish Aid.**
- **We urge the government to ensure that adequate resources are made available in the area of HIV and AIDS mainstreaming across its divisions and in its embassies overseas.**

Irish Aid programmes should be inclusive of participation of CSOs and PLWHA at every stage of planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation, including in the creation of financial management and tracking of expenditures.

- **We request the government to include civil society representatives in the membership of the new national Technical Advisory Group on HIV&AIDS and Other Communicable Diseases.**
- **Irish Aid should prioritise funding to ensure meaningful participation of civil society in national responses and capacity building of civil society to engage in national forums and HIV and AIDS co-ordination structures.**
- **Irish Aid should protect and promote the human rights of PLWHA and the rights of women and vulnerable groups. We urge Irish Aid to support national level reviews of legislation and policies that eliminate AIDS associated stigma and discrimination.**

3. Increased, Accelerated and Time-bound Financial Investment Required

The economic barriers facing developing countries must be addressed in tandem with a scaling up of financial resources for the HIV and AIDS response.

Increased, accelerated and time-bound financial investment targets for donor countries must be incorporated into the Political Declaration document (2006) with strong accountability mechanisms for delivery.

We welcome the Taoiseach's announcement last September of a doubling of funding for HIV and AIDS and other global communicable diseases to €100 million per year.

- **We welcome Ireland's commitment to meeting the target of spending 0.7% of our national wealth on overseas aid by 2012 at the latest. We call on the Government to enact legislation to copper fasten this commitment and timetable.**
- **Ireland should support the cancellation in full of unpayable debts of poor countries by fair and transparent means. Ireland should work to ensure that international trade rules work for poor countries.**

We are, however, concerned by the lack of clarity on criteria for decision-making on spending from the Irish Aid HIV and AIDS budget.

We request the government to report publicly and regularly on the criteria for allocation of funds and on the impact of expenditure to date.

We call on the Government to put pressure on its EU counterparts to ensure that similar data is made available for EU-level funding decisions.

4. Programmes and Interventions Requiring Increased Support

Ireland should support credible, costed, evidence based, inclusive and sustainable national AIDS programmes.

Stigma and Discrimination

Stigma and discrimination remain major barriers to an effective response to the epidemic. We support the call from the NGO representatives of the HIV Services Network and from HIV positive people in Ireland for a domestic strategy to tackle stigma and discrimination.

- **We urge Irish Aid to promote and support the development of national strategies against stigma and discrimination in developing countries.**
- **Irish Aid should prioritise support toward HIV and AIDS education campaigns in local languages in developing countries.**

Gender Equality and Women's Rights

Irish Aid should increase its support toward HIV and AIDS education for women and girls.

- **We urge Irish Aid to prioritise support toward gender equality and women's rights initiatives specifically.**
- **We urge Irish Aid to contribute to global coverage for prevention of mother-to-child transmission programmes.**

Strengthening Health Systems

We urge Irish Aid to prioritise increased funding for investment in strengthening of human resources and health systems so that people's right to basic services is assured.

- **We urge the government to outline more clearly the relationship between its HIV and AIDS work and its health sector interventions.**

- **Irish Aid should support alternative and appropriate models of service delivery that are community based and that include Behaviour Change Interventions (BCI), Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) and HIV drug prescription provided by community workers and PLWHA. AIDS interventions should be integrated into Primary Health Care (PHC), Mother and Child Health (MCH), Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), TB, nutrition and orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) programmes.**
- **Irish Aid should support programmes which reduce or eliminate user fees for AIDS services into supported interventions.**

5. Long term Approach & North-South Equality in the Global Response

Lack of coherence in national government programmes and international aid efforts have often resulted in either unnecessary duplication of efforts or failure to address the most urgent needs. Country ownership and national level leadership is crucial to enhance effectiveness and ensure alignment in international responses to national priorities.

We urge the Irish government to ensure that supported programmes are funded over the long term and that supported programmes adhere to the 'Three Ones' principle (one HIV and AIDS action framework; one national AIDS co-ordinating body; one monitoring and evaluation system).

6. Affordability of HIV Commodities

The Irish government should strongly promote the affordability of HIV commodities through:

- **Exploiting fully the flexibilities within the WTO TRIPS agreement to ensure access to treatment.**
- **supporting public-private partnerships for development of new technologies (ARVs, vaccines, microbicides).**
- **ensuring funded programmes provide male and female condoms for free or at very low cost.**
- **Supporting local production of HIV commodities.**

7. Universal Access

The UNGASS review must commit to the development of strategies that will address country level barriers to treatment such as poor human resource capacity and weak health infrastructures.

We urge the Irish government to make a strong commitment to address the serious challenges and obstacles that impede the scale up of prevention, treatment, care and support services. Ireland should support countries that develop plans to provide access to treatment and care to all those who need it by 2010.

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