

PRESS STATEMENT

08 July 2008

Irish NGOs urge Government to protect overseas aid spending

Amid widespread speculation around the nature and scale of cuts in Irish public spending, Dóchas today urged the Government to honour its commitments to the world's poor and to shelter the overseas aid budget.

With the G8 meeting in Japan to discuss how we can make 2008 a turning point against poverty, this is not the time for Ireland to cut its aid allocation for the world's poorest countries, said the 39 member aid agencies of Dóchas.

"The Government has said it will protect the vulnerable from the effects of these cuts. That should certainly include those living in poverty overseas, or severely affected by conflict, disaster or disease, for whom Irish aid spending is vital and often life-saving," said Dóchas policy officer Éamonn Casey.

The government has committed to achieving the UN target of spending 0.7% of GNP on overseas aid by 2012 and is currently on course to do that, having met an interim commitment to spending by 2007.

Irish aid makes a real difference to real people in the poorest and most difficult circumstances, so any 'corrective action' in Irish public spending must put a high priority on not hurting the world's poor, Dóchas stated.

Holding firm now on our commitment to the UN target is vital. In the first place, this is a solemn pledge that Ireland has made to the poor of the world – recently underlined by both Minister for Overseas Development Peter Power and the Taoiseach – and one that we need to keep to maintain the international respect we have built up for our aid programme.

Secondly, An Taoiseach Brian Cowen made clear in June that, in looking for savings, the Government would prioritise the needs of the poor and vulnerable. It is clear that they are not only in Ireland but also in developing countries, and especially in Africa, so the Government must protect overseas aid expenditure in lining up its spending cuts.

Thirdly, Ireland's overseas aid spending is making a real difference towards reducing poverty and inequality in some of the world's poorest countries – a goal shared by over 850,000 people who support Dóchas member aid agencies. Without Ireland's assistance, thousands of people would not have access to school, health services or

HIV drugs; thousands more would not have access to humanitarian assistance in disaster situations.

Despite new pressures, Ireland is still one of the world's wealthiest countries and must maintain its commitment to those less fortunate – not least through maintaining a strong commitment to overseas aid spending and the 0.7% target.

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***Dóchas** is the association of Irish Non-Governmental Development Organisations. It provides a forum for consultation and cooperation between its 39 members, and helps them speak with a single voice on development issues.
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