

DÓCHAS
The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

PRESS STATEMENT

4 February 2009

Development NGOs' Response to National Recovery Plan

Irish Aid Agencies Seek Emergency Meeting with Ministers on Unfair and Disproportionate Aid Cuts

Ireland's overseas development NGOs today asked for an emergency meeting with Ministers Micheál Martin and Peter Power to seek clarification about the government's commitment to its international obligations.

The Board of Dóchas, the umbrella group of Ireland's leading aid agencies, met this morning to express its shock at the Government's decision to slash the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget by €95 million.

In letters to the two Ministers, Dóchas stated that the decision to cut the aid budget has raised serious question marks about the Government's ability and willingness to adhere to the UN target of spending 0.7% of national income on overseas aid by 2012.

"In yesterday's speech, the Taoiseach said once again that the government will be guided by the principles of fairness and prudence, and that it is his intention to support the vulnerable in this time of economic difficulties. We are asking of the Ministers whether it is 'fair and prudent' to hit the poorest by cutting life-saving aid," said Hans Zomer, spokesman for the 39 member organisations of Dóchas.

"It has been proven time and again that Irish aid works and reaches the poorest people; those who have not contributed to the financial crisis but are worst hit by it" said Zomer.

"We are seeking an emergency meeting with the Ministers, as we are concerned that Ireland is in danger of reneging on its promises to the poorest people on earth."

"We understand that the government is forced to make difficult decisions, but these cuts are disproportionate, as well as wrong: The cuts in the aid budget represent 5% of the total cuts made by the government, even though overseas aid represents less than 2% of government expenditure" stated Hans Zomer, Dóchas Director.

The members of Dóchas pointed out that Ireland was proud of its leadership in tackling international poverty as aid spending increased, but is now in danger of losing that leadership.

"Ireland's economic reputation has taken a severe hit in the past couple of months, but we still have our moral credibility. We remind the government that international credibility depends on adherence to principles and pledges in difficult times as well as in good

times. The world's poor are already being hit by the financial crisis, soaring food prices and climate change, and cannot withstand an aid crisis too," said Zomer.

[ENDS]

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Notes for the Editor

1. The Government Budget of 2008 announced €891 million in Official Development Assistance spending for 2009. The cut of €95 million announced yesterday represents a cutback of more than 10% in the overseas aid spending for 2009 that the Government had budgeted in October.

Ireland has committed to reaching the UN target of spending 0.7% of national income by 2012 and an interim benchmark of 0.6% by 2010. With this cutback, ODA percentage spending drops back to pre-2006 levels at 0.53% – making it increasingly difficult to reach the 0.6% interim target in 2010.

2. The latest cut of €95 million represents more than the combined Irish Aid spending on five of Ireland's priority countries for development cooperation in 2007: East Timor, Malawi, Lesotho, Vietnam and Uganda. These are some of the poorest and most troubled countries in the world, with huge challenges – to get sufficient food, or manage an education, or earn a basic income – facing large sections of society.
3. In 2008, the number of people suffering from hunger on a daily basis rose to a staggering 963 million, one out of every seven people in the world. Ireland launched a high-profile Hunger Task Force to suggest ways it could help, and recently announced the appointment of a Special Envoy for Hunger.
4. Civil society groups, including NGOs, missionary groups and others in Ireland and developing countries, received a total of €117.6 million in 2007 towards their work on emergencies, education, health, food and agriculture, HIV and AIDS, income generation projects, and other areas (Irish Aid Annual Report 2007).

This €95 million cut represents the equivalent of more than 80% of the spending on all that work with the world's poor, across numerous countries, to reduce the appalling human suffering caused by poverty and inequality.

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. For more information, visit: www.dochas.ie

Dóchas Member Agencies

1. ActionAid Ireland
2. Action from Ireland
3. Aidlink
4. Amnesty International-Irish Section
5. Bóthar
6. Centre for Global Education
7. ChildFund Ireland
8. Children in Crossfire
9. Christian Aid Ireland
10. Church Mission Society Ireland
11. Comhlámh
12. Concern Worldwide
13. Friends of Londiani (Ireland)
14. Galway One World Centre
15. Gorta
16. International Service Ireland
17. Irish League of Credit Unions Foundation
18. Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs
19. Irish Council for International Students
20. Irish Family Planning Association
21. Irish Foundation for Cooperative Development
22. Irish Missionary Union
23. Irish Red Cross
24. Kerry Action for Development Education
25. National Youth Council of Ireland
26. Oxfam Ireland
27. Plan Ireland
28. Self Help Africa
29. Skillshare International Ireland
30. Suas Educational Development
31. The Hope Foundation
32. Trócaire
33. Vita
34. Voluntary Service International
35. Voluntary Service Overseas
36. Volunteer Missionary Movement
37. War on Want Northern Ireland
38. Wingspread International
39. World Vision Ireland