

**PRESS STATEMENT**

3 February 2009

**Development NGOs' Response to National Recovery Plan**

**Massive overseas aid cut shocks Irish agencies  
as world recession again hits the world's poor**

Ireland's overseas development NGOs today expressed shock at the Government's decision to slash the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget by €95 million. The member organisations of Dóchas stated that the latest round of aid cuts seriously undermines the Taoiseach's own promise to protect the world's poor and vulnerable from the worst of the expenditure cuts.

"Ireland's aid agencies recognise that unprecedented times call for strong measures, but taking such an enormous portion from the aid budget – more than 10% of the sum budgeted in October – will seriously hit the poorest of the poor," said Hans Zomer of Dóchas, the umbrella group of overseas aid agencies.

"We acknowledge that the Government faces difficult choices but are dismayed at the size of this cut, the third significant chop to the aid budget in just 7 months. This raises serious question marks about the strength of Government commitment to delivering on its international pledges to fight poverty."

Ireland has committed to spending 0.7% of Gross National Income on overseas aid by 2012 and is supposed to reach a 0.6% benchmark in 2010. But the overseas aid programme was hit by €45 million in the public spending cuts of July 2008 – a disproportionately large share of the total then – and another €15m was taken from the aid budget in October.

With this latest €95 million cut, Ireland's performance has fallen back to a pre-2006 percentage level at 0.53% spending of national income on ODA. After today, there is a new spotlight on the seriousness of Ireland's commitment to its international obligations.

"Ireland was proud of its leadership in tackling international poverty as aid spending increased, but international standing depends on adherence to principles, commitments 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.

"If we want economic growth with global stability, we need to work towards a fair and just world. Ireland needs to invest in developing countries, not turn its back on the poor when times get tough"

**[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 today 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.

Irish Aid's contribution to the World Food Programme's food aid convention was €8.5 million in 2007 and this cut of €95 million represents more than 11 times that figure.

4. The €95 million cut is also highly significant by comparison with Ireland's total spending of over €100 million on HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases in 2007 (Irish Aid Annual Report 2007)
5. Malawi, Irish Aid's latest 'programme country', is one of the poorest in the world and faces huge challenges in relation to HIV and AIDS, food security and education. The Irish Aid programme there is due to be launched this year, but in 2008 it put in place an 'interim assistance package' of €10m. The latest cut is 9.5 times that sum and could threaten, or put on hold, the Malawi programme.
6. 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](http://www.dochas.ie)