

DÓCHAS
The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

PRESS STATEMENT

2 April 2009

Development NGOs meet with Oireachtas Committee on Overseas Development

Irish NGOs say aid cuts will cost thousands of lives

Irish aid agencies called today on the major opposition parties to urge the government to stop cutting overseas aid.

In a presentation to the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Overseas Development, representatives of Ireland's aid agencies called on all political parties to show that Ireland has not forgotten its promises to the world's poorest people.

“The Government could find €7 billion to assist a reckless banking sector, and is now seriously considering making the world's poorest people pay the bill” said Hans Zomer, Director of Dóchas, the umbrella group of Ireland's major aid agencies.

The Irish overseas aid budget has been cut by €45 million in July 2008, by another €15 million in October, as well as by €95 million in February this year.

At the meeting in Leinster House, Tom Arnold CEO of Concern and Jim Clarken, CEO of Oxfam Ireland, gave detailed information on how the aid cuts are affecting their organisation's work on the ground.

“Oxfam Ireland is running a programme in Congo, where we have had great success in dramatically reducing the number of deaths from cholera. The aid cuts mean that the 182,000 people we were helping will now be without access to clean drinking water. Let's be clear here, if we stop funding this programme, people will die” said Jim Clarken of Oxfam Ireland.

/ends/

**“Let's be clear: if we stop funding this programme, people will die”
says Oxfam Ireland CEO**

Notes for the Editors

- At the UN Millennium Review Summit in 2005, the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern committed Ireland to reaching the UN target for spending 0.7% of our GNP on overseas aid in 2012.
- The government set interim targets “against which our progress towards the target can be measured”. The interim target set for 2010, next year, is 0.6% of GNI.
- In the 2006 White Paper on Irish Aid, the government declared that development cooperation was an integral part, a “central plank”, of Ireland’s foreign policy.
- In the White Paper, the government said that the “overarching objective” of our development cooperation efforts is to reduce poverty, to reduce vulnerability and increase opportunity.
- In September last year, and indeed in January this year, Taoiseach Brian Cowen reiterated our “solemn” promise. In his response to Pope Benedict’s new year’s message, the Taoiseach said:

“I welcome the commitments made in the Declaration that issued at the Doha Conference in December and note that, despite serious economic difficulties, Ireland remains on course to achieve the target of spending 0.7 per cent of GNP on Overseas Development Aid. In this time of global economic crisis, His Holiness’ message is a timely reminder of the obligation that we in the developed world have to assist those in greater need. Poverty destroys human potential, increases vulnerability and limits opportunity. We must ensure that progress already made is safeguarded and that commitments made in fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals do not falter.”

For further information, see www.dochas.ie

Contact:

- Hans Zomer, Dóchas Director, tel. 085 728 3258 / 01 405 3801
- Jim Clarken, CEO Oxfam Ireland, tel. 01 6727662 / 085 8003 250
- Eamonn Casey, Dóchas Policy Officer, tel 087 9506222,
policy@dochas.ie