

DÓCHAS
The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

PRESS STATEMENT

9 February 2009

**Irish Aid Agencies Meet Minister Power
on Aid Cuts today in Limerick**

Ireland's overseas development NGOs are to meet Minister Peter Power today in Limerick to express their shock at the Government's continued cuts to the overseas aid budget.

The Board of Dóchas, the umbrella group of Ireland's leading aid agencies, is to meet the Minister of State for Overseas Development in Limerick today at noon to express its deep disappointment that assistance to the world's desperately poor people has been targeted for Government cuts.

"Ireland has publicly committed to achieving the UN target of spending 0.7% of national income on overseas aid by 2012," said Hans Zomer, director of Dóchas.

"This promise was made at the highest possible level, at a gathering of world leaders at the United Nations. Ireland was very happy to gather the international praise and recognition that this promise to the world's poor has brought us. Now that our resolve is being tested, we cannot change our minds and forget about our promises to the bottom billion" said Zomer, speaking for the 39 member organisations of Dóchas.

Dóchas requested the emergency meeting following Tuesday's announcement that the Government is cutting the aid budget for the third time in seven months.

The latest reduction of €95 million comes on top of earlier cuts in July 2008 (€45 million) and October 2008 (€15 million), and has provoked an outcry across the country. Aid agencies say the cuts make it extremely difficult for the Government to reach its own interim target of spending 0.6% of national income on overseas aid by 2010.

"We have sought this emergency meeting with the Ministers because we are concerned that Ireland is letting down the world's poor at a time when they are already reeling from the triple whammy of the global financial crisis, the food price crisis and the effects of climate change," said Zomer.

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

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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.

At the heart of the UN target of countries spending 0.7% of national income on ODA is that, although the volume of ODA (in real terms) may increase or decrease as economies grow or shrink, **the percentage spend of national income is achievable even in more difficult economic times**. It's on that clear understanding that Ireland made and repeatedly underlined its commitment to the UN target – at home, within the EU and on the wider international stage.

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