

DÓCHAS
The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

PRESS STATEMENT

07 May 2009

OECD Calls on Government to Meet Aid Targets

External review shows aid from Ireland works but repeated cuts eroding the benefits, say NGOs

Commenting on the launch today [7 May] of an independent review of Ireland's overseas aid programme, Irish aid agencies said the country has reason to be proud of its international aid programme. However, they warned that the government's dramatic cuts to the budget are destroying the benefits - both for Ireland and for the world's poorest countries.

"The OECD shows clearly that Ireland's development assistance is world class, and that Ireland has gained huge respect internationally on the basis of it. Unfortunately, many of the strengths of the programme are going out the window with the government's devastating cuts," said Hans Zomer, director of Dóchas, the network of Ireland's development NGOs.

The OECD report demonstrates that Ireland's aid has benefits for poor people in the world's poorest countries: it is flexible, effective, concentrates mostly on the poorest countries and is highly targeted on social sectors and emergency relief that directly affect poor people. Ireland has become a world leader for the volume and quality of its development assistance, giving it visibility and international regard well beyond its size, but the scale of cuts threatens to undo this.

"The government's strategy to fight the recession is based on attempts to repair our damaged international reputation as a country 'open for business'. Yet, by repeatedly and disproportionately cutting development assistance, undermining progress on its solemn international commitments, it is ruining our reputation as a country that keeps its promises," said Zomer.

"We made promises to the world's poorest people, and built an international profile and reputation on the strength of those promises. That reputation lies in tatters now that the government has shown it is willing to attack the aid budget repeatedly, disproportionately and unfairly. We are fast acquiring a reputation as fair weather friends, rather than serious international partners."

One of the most striking sections of the report is where the OECD "strongly urges Ireland to continue to make progress towards meeting the ODA/GNI target of 0.7% in

2012, and to reach its interim target of 0.6% in 2010 *even in an environment of declining GNI.*”

While ODA increases have enhanced Ireland’s status, the OECD reports, “the challenge for the Irish Government is to reach the targets it has set itself in the face of the current severe economic downturn” and to “refrain from further Budgetary action that would be inconsistent with its stated aid commitments”.

Yet, the Government has ignored that advice – offered before the Supplementary Budget in April, even though the report is launched today – instead choosing to emphasise other parts of the OECD report that praise the programme.

“We are calling on the government to make sure there will be no further cuts to the aid budget, and to present a clear plan on how we are going to keep our promise to help make poverty history,” Zomer added.

/ENDS/

Notes for the Editor

About the aid cuts

- At the UN Millennium Review Summit in 2005, the former 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 target set for 2010 is 0.6% of GNI.
- Due to massive and unprecedented cuts to the budget, Ireland’s aid expenditure for 2009 is predicted to fall well short of the target and reach only 0.48% of GNI.
- The Irish overseas aid budget was cut by €45 million in July 2008, by another €15 million in October, by €95 million in February 2009 and by a further €100 million in April 2009.
- The cuts in 2009 alone represent 22% of the total aid budget - well in excess of the Department of Finance’s projected shrinkage in national income this year, at 8%.

A summary of the report is available at

http://www.oecd.org/document/38/0,3343,en_2649_34603_42592230_1_1_1_1,00.html

For further information, see www.dochas.ie

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Dóchas is the association of Irish Non-Governmental Development Organisations. It provides a forum for consultation and cooperation between its 44 members, and helps them speak with a single voice on development issues. For more information, visit: www.dochas.ie

Dóchas Member Agencies

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| 18. Gorta | 41. Volunteer Missionary Movement |
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