

<b>Media/Source</b>	<b>: Irish Times</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>: 31 March</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>: Commitment to overseas aid</b>

Letter to the Editor

## **Commitment to overseas aid**

- Madam, – In her interview in The Irish Times (March 21st), US secretary of state Hillary Clinton rightly describes Ireland as a leader in development and humanitarian aid. Back in 2000, we were among the first OECD countries to publicly commit to meeting the target of spending 0.7 per cent of national income on overseas aid. Over the past decade we have increased our aid budget substantially and gained widespread kudos for this at the highest levels. Our role in aid and humanitarian work is widely seen as a cornerstone of our foreign policy.

Ireland's international leadership role in this area, however, could evaporate in the coming weeks if the Government chooses to break its long-standing commitment on overseas aid in the forthcoming budget. The target of 0.7 per cent is already based on a country's ability to pay – as income increases or decreases so too will the aid budget. The 17 per cent cut in predicted aid spending already made since July 2008, however, far exceeds any anticipated downturn in GNP. Any further cuts to aid in the coming budget, in our view, will make meeting our commitment of 0.7 per cent by 2012 almost impossible to reach. Breaking our commitment at this stage will irrevocably tarnish Ireland's international reputation.

Trócaire appreciates the gravity of the situation facing Ireland. But the Government must be fair when deciding where to cut its expenditure and the aid budget cannot simply be seen as a soft target. We must remember that Ireland's aid saves lives – and that lives are at risk if we do not meet our commitments. If the Government lives up to its responsibilities I believe it will be welcomed by all parties in the Dáil and the majority of the public. – Yours, etc,

JUSTIN KILCULLEN,

Director,

Trócaire, Maynooth,

Co Kildare.