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THE GOVERNMENT is still committed to reaching its spending target on overseas aid by 2012, but 0.7 per cent of “a basket-case economy” will be no good to developing countries, the Minister of State for Irish Aid said yesterday.

Speaking at the Dóchas agm in Dublin, the Minister, Peter Power was unable to promise the representatives of 39 NGOs that there would not be more cuts in the overseas aid programme in the December budget.

Despite a target to spend 0.7 per cent of gross national product on overseas aid by 2012, some €160 million was cut from the overseas aid budget in the last nine months.

In advance of the Minister’s arrival, Hans Zomer, director of Dóchas, the Irish NGO association, told a packed meeting that people should communicate their level of disgust and shock at the cuts, but remember that Mr Power was their ally.

Mr Power’s speech was received politely. He said he genuinely regretted it had been necessary to reduce funding for the overseas aid programme.

“The sole objective behind the decision to make cuts was to stabilise the Government finances,” he said.

He said Ireland was still the sixth most generous aid donor in the world per capita.

And he asked NGOs to give serious consideration to how they could improve their organisation’s effectiveness, and said they had to get “more for less”.

An angry Justin Kilcullen, director of Trócaire, said the decision to cut the aid budget was political expediency at its very worst.

“It represented less than 2 per cent of the savings of the budget yet we know the impact it has on people who depend on that money and that commitment.”

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