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# Trócaire accuses Government of hiding cuts in aid

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THE DIRECTOR of Trócaire has accused the Government of using UN aid targets based on percentage of GNP to hide disproportionate cuts to the overseas development budget.

The Irish Aid budget has been drastically pruned several times in the past year, with April's emergency budget reducing State spending on overseas development assistance (ODA) to €696 million or 0.48 per cent of GNP.

The Government, however, continues to insist that it remains committed to achieving the UN target of spending 0.7 per cent of GNP on ODA by 2012.

On a visit to Dublin in July, UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon said Irish officials had reassured him the 2012 target still stands.

Because the State's ODA target is set as a percentage of GNP, the aid budget shrinks automatically as the economy contracts.

Many in the development sector argue, however, that recent cuts – which constitute more than 20 per cent of the total ODA budget – represent a disproportionate blow, and that the aid budget has been used as an easy target for reasons of political expediency.

Speaking at the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs yesterday, Trócaire director Justin Kilcullen said the fact the Government was using the international target to bolster its case on the issue of ODA cuts was a “perversion” of the intentions under which the targets were established by the UN.

Mr Kilcullen, along with representatives from other development agencies, detailed how the work of Irish NGOs had been affected by the recent cuts.

Trócaire will have to end its programmes in Zambia, Nigeria, Peru and Indonesia, while in Ireland alone it will have to shed 27 jobs.

Concern chief executive Tom Arnold and the agency's Kenya country director Anne O'Mahony told the committee that it will have to cut 500 jobs worldwide due to funding shortfalls.

Helen Keogh, chairwoman of Dochas, an umbrella group representing more than 30 development organisations, said the sector had been "bowled over" by "disproportionate cuts".

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