

Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs

Strategy Statement 2005-2007

November 2004

a) Background

As part of the consultation process being conducted by the Development Cooperation Directorate in connection with the revised Strategy Statement 2005-2007 for the Department of Foreign Affairs, Dóchas was invited to submit comments on the current Strategy Statement 2003-2005.

Dóchas is the association of Irish Non-Governmental Development Organisations. Dóchas provides a forum for consultation and co-operation between its members and helps them speak with a single voice on development issues. Dóchas was formed in October 1993, following a merger between CONGOOD - which represented the common interests of Irish Development NGOs since 1974, and the Irish National Assembly - which linked most Irish Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGDOs) into a European Union NGO network.

The vision of Dóchas is to contribute, through the cooperative efforts of our Members, to sustainable human development in a world where people are able to enjoy their rights and are empowered to fulfil their needs.

As the national platform of Irish Development NGOs, Dóchas represents its members to the European Union and the Irish Government, on issues of importance to the policy environment in which they work. By promoting cooperation among its members, Dóchas contributes to improving the quality and impact of their work.

Dóchas would like to contribute the following elements for consideration in the Department's planning process:

- Official Development Assistance
- Management
- Policy Coherence
- Civil Society
- Security & Development
- Multilateralism

1) Official Development Assistance

It has been Government policy since 2000 to reach the UN target of spending 0.7% of GNP on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) by 2007. The current Programme for Government includes this commitment.

This landmark policy decision was announced by An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, in September 2000 at the UN Millennium Summit in New York, following a cabinet decision. The Taoiseach has repeatedly reaffirmed the Government's commitment to this target, including at the UN General Assembly in October 2003. Following recent uncertainty the Government decision to reach 0.7% of GNP in ODA by 2007 was again reaffirmed by the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Although there has been a significant and very welcome increase in ODA in money terms in recent years, the current situation is that Ireland will renege on the commitments made on the 0.7% target.

The figures for the 2005 ODA budget announced on 18 November represent a major shift in policy, as the projected growth falls well short of any plan to reach 0.7%. With the Minister for Finance's

announcement of €60 million additional funding for 2005 and further increases of €65 million for both 2006 and 2007, the Irish ODA budget is at a virtual stand-still in percentage terms. Using available ESRI figures for future GDP levels, it is hard to see how Ireland will reach 0.5% of GDP by 2007, let alone the promised 0.7%.

Worse, in the absence of a clear growth strategy, it is extremely unlikely that the Government will reach 0.7% in the foreseeable future.

Recommendation:

If the Department is to fulfil its Mission Statement, an effective, credible and well-resourced ODA programme is essential.

- **If it is to be credible, the Irish aid programme cannot afford more broken promises. A multi-annual growth plan is essential, with clear and credible benchmarks and a clear time-frame for reaching the 0.7% target;**
- **ODA must be taken out of the annual estimates "wrangle"¹. Legislation to copper fasten Ireland's commitment to the 0.7% target should be put in place**

It is important that the environmental analysis section of the Strategy Statement refer clearly to the Millennium Development Goals. These Goals, formulated at the UN's Millennium Summit in New York in 2000, lay the foundations for the international community's joint efforts at eradicating poverty.

- **Ireland's ODA programme, and indeed its Foreign Policies, should be aimed at ensuring the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.**

2) Management

The Report of the Ireland Aid Review Committee, adopted by the Government in 2002, lays out the modalities for implementing the Government decision to achieve 0.7% of GNP in ODA by 2007, including dealing with capacity issues.

Central elements included:

- a. A Development Co-operation Division in the Department of Foreign Affairs: The Review recommended that DCI (then Ireland Aid) remain a part of the Department of Foreign Affairs.
- b. Additional Programme Countries: The Review recommended some additional programme countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia chosen from amongst Least Developed Countries in those regions.
- c. Strategic Investment in Multilateral Agencies: The Review recommended continuing investment in multilateral agencies including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and the World Health Organisation and UN AIDS amongst others.
- d. Appropriate Levels of Staffing: The Review said 'It is of the utmost importance that staff numbers in Ireland Aid (now DCI) keep pace with the expanding budget and that, by the time the 0.7% target is achieved in 2007, the full complement required to administer a programme of this size is in place.'
- e. A focus on basic services: The review recommended that Education and Health continue to be given very high priority.
- f. HIV/AIDS: The committee recommended that the HIV/AIDS be made a leading priority of the programme.
- g. NGO funding: The review recommended a significant increase in the overall level of financial support made available to NGOs.

Recommendation:

- **The recommendations of the Ireland Aid Review need to be implemented in full. Staffing levels and management structures proposed by the Review need to be realised;**
- **The proposed relocation of DCI to Limerick, which de facto deviates from one of the core recommendations of the Review, must be stopped;**

¹ Liz O'Donnell, Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs with Special Responsibility for Overseas Development Assistance and Human Rights, Ireland Aid Annual Report 2000, p. 3.

- **For the Department to engage more strategically with the wide range of policy areas within its remit, it is imperative to continue to invest in the building of internal capacity, as well as the capacity of its core partners. Training policies are essential in this respect, but the loss of expertise through staff rotation and the low level of engagement in sector-wide learning processes need similarly to be addressed.**

3) Policy Coherence

The Department has rightly acknowledged that the prospects of developing country to escape from poverty and marginalisation do not solely depend on the outcomes of development cooperation efforts, but are to a great extent determined by factors such as trade, foreign investment and environmental damage. Many of these factors lie firmly within the realm, not of the developing countries themselves, but of the industrialised countries of the OECD.

Effective aid policies on the part of these rich countries therefore need to be accompanied by a coherent set of pro-development policies in Ireland's other external policies.

Trade represents a viable exit route from poverty for many households and states. Already the 49 poorest countries earn eight times more from trade than they receive in aid. They also depend on international trade more than rich countries do: half their GDP comes from trade while on average OECD countries earn less than a fifth of their income from trade.

Recommendations:

- **Commit at Departmental and Governmental level to achieving greater policy coherence for development:**
This can be achieved by:
 - **Promoting the use of coherence assessment instruments, and apply these to a number of substantial cases, in order to guarantee that decisions in the field of trade, agriculture and security do not have adverse effects on development and the realisation of the MDGs;**
 - **Putting in place functioning coherence mechanisms, as well as regular meetings between the Ministers for Trade, Development and Agriculture to ensure top level leadership;**
 - **Ensuring greater transparency on Ireland's policy stances in relation to international trade and development, for instance by strengthening debate in the Oireachtas on these matters;**
 - **Working within the WTO framework to stop all dumping of European produce on developing country markets and to allow developing countries the policy space to develop the same level of protection currently accorded to EU member states;**
 - **Encouraging new mechanisms to promote [increased imports into the Ireland and the European Union of goods produced in poor countries, especially the 'least developed countries'](#);**
 - **Adopting the DCI Gender and HIV/AIDS policies at Departmental level, to ensure effective mainstreaming of Gender and HIV/AIDS concerns in all policy processes.**

4) Civil Society

Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI) has built up considerable expertise about the importance of civil society in developmental processes, and is currently in the process of formulating a civil society policy to frame that expertise for future use. Over the last number of years, DCI has brought its cooperation with civil society organisations to new, strategic levels, to the benefit of both the impact, the transparency and the public awareness of DCI's programme.

Recent remarks by the Minister of State with responsibility for Development Cooperation and Human Rights have shown that support for these new directions is not universal, and that misconceptions about the role of NGOs in Development continue to exist.

Furthermore, the Department of Foreign Affairs as a whole has no clear policy on its engagement with civil society organisations. Whereas the Department's cooperation with NGOs in the sphere of Human Rights policies continues to improve, many areas of the Department's work do not systematically engage with civil society representatives, either abroad or at home.

Recommendations:

- **The Department needs to develop models of strategic engagement with civil society organisations. Such engagement should rise above simple consultation mechanisms and be based on a clearly formulated civil society policy, such as currently being elaborated by Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI). Based on this policy, a number of targeted strategic relations can be shaped, in furtherance of the common objectives of the Department and Irish civil society organisations;**
- **Rather than focusing narrowly on promoting the awareness of the DCI programme, the Department needs to work with civil society organisations and other stakeholders such as trade unions, employers' organisations and domestic media to enhance the Irish public's understanding of the complexities of overseas development and global poverty and justice issues, as well as Ireland's policies to improve and alleviate them.**

5) Security & Development

In recent years, the complex relationship between Development, Security, Peace and Conflict has been given greater attention. The notion that Development automatically would lead to greater Peace and Security has been discredited and the international community is appropriately devoting greater attention to the violent processes that undermine Development in many countries.

The balance, however, seems to be swinging towards the other extreme, with resources being increasingly channelled to military approaches to questions of security and conflict. Rather than focusing on a multitude of causes for violence, and assessing human security in its fullness, Governments and international actors such as the EU are redefining their security paradigms almost exclusively in terms of intervention through military means. Combating terrorism and illegal migration are taking precedent over addressing the root causes of these phenomena.

Ireland's membership of the Human Security network places it at the heart of a new and potentially ground-breaking initiative to redefine "security" issues from a holistic perspective, bringing balance to addressing legitimate fears of terrorism and violent conflict on the one hand and laying the ground work for developmental processes and human security in all its dimensions.

Recommendations:

- **Ireland should adopt the Human Security concept, with the centrality of Human Rights, as its framework for policy-making in the area of Foreign Affairs and Security policy;**
- **Adopting the Human Security paradigm will mean a renewed focus on all threats, both those of a violent and those of a more structural nature. Respect and fulfilment of Human Rights are at the heart of the Human Security concept, and it prompts action on both the "traditional" security threats and the less publicised violations of people's rights to food, health and well-being;**
- **The Department's engagement with Human Rights issues is currently focused on ensuring that Ireland's Human Rights commitments are implemented, and on participation in international Human Rights fora. For Ireland to seriously address Human Rights issues, however, a more "mainstreamed" approach to Human Rights is essential;**

- **The Department of Foreign Affairs needs to engage in a systematic with a wide variety of actors with expertise in this area: Development NGOs, the defence forces, Human Rights organisations and security analysts, in order to reinforce its policy processes;**
- **In an era of increasingly blurring lines between military and aid workers, Ireland needs to be at the forefront of upholding the international humanitarian principles.**

6) Multilateralism

A strong commitment to multilateralism has traditionally been a defining factor for Ireland's foreign policy. This is based on the recognition that international law provides a global framework for the assertion of rights and resolution of grievances. The rule of law ensures equity among unequal power holders. Where states act outside this framework they undermine the international order and put the security of all at risk.

Within the multilateral system, the UN has a central role to play in ensuring that peace is maintained between nations. At the same time, the concept of multilateralism and the role of the UN in particular are under threat. To be effective, the role of the UN must extend beyond 'keeping the peace' between states. It must play a stronger role as the focal point within global governance for decision-making on the critical issues undermining Human Security, such as poverty and disease. Through effective reform, the various organs of the UN must be strengthened to enable it to play a coordinating function between the various institutional stakeholders on macro-policy issues.

Another key level of international policy-making from Ireland's perspective is the European Union. The EU is a major player in development cooperation, and it is making its weight felt more and more in the sphere of international trade, security and foreign policies. It is important to use these opportunities in a constructive way, ensuring that the EU remains true to its core values of peaceful cooperation, Human Rights and social justice.

Recommendations:

- **One of the core agreements within the UN system in recent years has been the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals. Ireland should take the lead to ensure that the international community does not miss this opportunity to halve world poverty by 2015. Ireland's ODA programme is a key element in this context, and the aid programme should be geared towards the MDG targets;**
- **Currently, roughly one-third of Irish ODA is channelled through multi-lateral channels. This percentage should be increased in the very near future, allowing for Ireland to engage in a more coherent and strategic way with key actors such as the World Bank and a host of UN Development agencies;**
- **The Department of Foreign Affairs should actively promote efforts to reform United Nations structures and policies, in order to maximise the potential for a well-functioning multilateral system;**
- **Ireland should build on the success of its 2004 EU Presidency to continue to work towards a more dynamic and strategic EU role in the world. This means that the values expressed in the draft Constitution are shaped and supported by an institutional framework. Current debate, on issues such as the Financial Perspectives and Commission reform, however, suggest a discord between Constitution stipulations and the practice of EU policy-making and implementation;**
- [Ireland should continue to promote vigorously the over-riding goals of poverty alleviation and sustainable growth in EU policies towards poor countries, in particular .](#)