

[Copy of the letter sent to Cabinet Ministers]

Minister

24 March 2009

“We must have a wide-ranging understanding of poverty, and ... individuals, peoples and nations must join in global solidarity to tackle its many causes.”

Taoiseach Brian Cowen, January 2009

Dear Minister

We, the representatives of the member organisations of Dóchas,¹ supported by 850,000 people in Ireland, are writing to you with an urgent call in defence of Ireland’s overseas aid budget.

Since June 2008, the Government has cut the Irish Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget three times, impacting directly on the poorest people on earth.

We understand and support the need to adjust government spending in the light of the economic crisis. However, the principles applied in making these cuts should include fairness, equity and a responsibility to protect the poorest and most vulnerable. Against these principles, we believe the cuts in the ODA budget are unjust, disproportionate and damaging Ireland’s strategic interests.

The cuts are **unjust**, as they are hitting countries and communities hardest that had no part in creating the global economic crisis, and are most adversely affected by it.

¹ Dóchas is the association of Irish Non-Governmental Development Organisations. Dóchas provides a forum for consultation and co-operation among its 39 member organisations and helps them speak with a single voice on development issues. Dóchas members are supported by over 850,000 people in Ireland. See www.dochas.ie

The World Bank estimates that the combined food and fuel crisis has pushed 130-150 million more people below the \$1.25 a day poverty line. Initial estimates for 2009 to 2015 indicate an average 200,000 to 400,000 **more** children may die unnecessarily each year if the crisis persists.

In Europe, we have strong solidarity mechanisms which will help us recover in due course. Developing country governments also need international assistance. Unlike Ireland, they do not have the reserves and fiscal flexibility to stimulate their economies. In this crisis they rely more, not less, on international cooperation and solidarity.

The cuts are **disproportionate**, in that the cuts in this area of expenditure are more than its relative size warrants.

Ireland's pledges on overseas aid are as a percentage of our national income. As the economy contracts, our overseas aid shrinks. However, the government has gone beyond this built-in reduction measure. In February, the aid budget was cut by €95 million, approximately 10% of the total aid programme. That followed previous cuts of €45 million and €15 million in July and October 2008. Looking back over just six months, Ireland's overseas aid programme has been consistently and disproportionately cut, by the equivalent of 17% of the projected aid budget for 2009.

We have committed to contributing 0.7% of our GNP to overseas aid by 2012. In the last 6 months, we have dropped back from 0.56% to 0.53%, moving further away from the solemn promise made before the international community in 2005 and reaffirmed in January this year.

Dóchas members fully understand and appreciate the gravity of the current global economic crisis and accept that all sections of Irish society need to contribute to getting through these tough times. Cuts to the aid budget, however will have a limited impact on overall expenditure and continue to impact disproportionately on the world's poorest people.

The cuts are **damaging Ireland's interests**, as they are damaging our standing in the world.

Ireland's overseas aid programme is at the heart of our foreign policy. It provides us with influence and access on the global stage. Moreover, Irish aid is a direct expression of important national values of solidarity and justice. Cutting our aid programme brings into question our continued commitment to the world's poorest people;

Finally and crucially **Ireland's aid works**. We have received overwhelming praise internationally for our aid programme. We are highly respected as a donor whose work is based on the principles of partnership, transparency, quality, coherence and long term sustainability. We are praised for our focus on the world's most vulnerable communities.

As you prepare to take the difficult decisions in relation to the forthcoming budget, we would ask you to ensure that the overseas aid budget is protected from further cuts, in recognition of the cuts already made and of the need to continue to support the world's poorest people at this time of global crisis. They have no voice but ours in these difficult times.

“We are bound together by more than globalisation. We are bound together by a shared humanity. The fate of others is a matter of concern to us. From this shared humanity comes a responsibility to those in great need beyond the borders of our own state.”

White Paper on Irish Aid

Yours truly,

Helen Keogh, Director of World Vision Ireland and Chairperson of Dóchas
Tom Arnold, CEO, Concern Worldwide
Jim Clarken, CEO, Oxfam Ireland
Colman Farrell, CEO, Suas Educational Development
Brian Hanratty, CEO, Gorta
Justin Kilcullen, Director, Trócaire
Malcolm Quigley, Director, VSO
Heike Vornhagen, Co-ordinator, Galway One World Centre