

Dóchas briefing to Oireachtas members

10 November 2010

Speech by Helen Keogh, Dóchas Chairperson

Check against delivery

Welcome and thank you for coming

- **The purpose of this informal gathering is to thank you** for your continued support for overseas aid and **to highlight** what Irish NGOs feel are the key issues facing our aid programme.
- This event is an opportunity to meet the NGOs. Not “just” the 45 member organisations of Dóchas – most of whom are very well known to you all – but also many of the 70+ organisations that support the “Act Now on 2015” campaign.
- It is great to see that those who support the most vulnerable here are also concerned for the poorest of the poor overseas.
- **What is really important to state here today is:** Ireland’s overseas aid programme is an expression of our national identity, it establishes us on the world stage and it is in the national interest.

Aid is now more important than ever

- Ireland has a long and proud tradition of standing by the world’s poorest people
- Despite the current difficulties, people in Ireland continue to support the work of Ireland’s development NGOs generously and philanthropy continues to grow.
- We can see the evidence of this in the nearly 30million euro donated by the Irish public to Haiti.
- The Government has reflected and recognised this deep-rooted commitment to the fight against poverty: it has made international development cooperation a cornerstone of our foreign policy.
- Our aid programme reflects the best of what we are as a nation. It is an expression of our values of human dignity, justice, equality and partnership, and it is based on practical action to improve the lives of millions of people across the developing world.
- Over the past 40 years, Ireland has built an enviable international reputation in emergency response and long-term development. Our actions have given us credibility, influence and leverage on the world stage.
- We do this not just because it is “the right thing to do”. There are definite and very clear moral reasons for us to give aid. But there are also more “enlightened self-interest” reasons - A safer,

more secure world is good for Ireland. Stability is good for us, and our aid programme helps us build partnerships with countries that are fast becoming major trade partners for us.

- The ***White Paper on Irish Aid*** reflects this – it says that Ireland’s aid efforts help create a more prosperous and equitable world and will also help bring about a safer and more stable world. This is an important goal for Ireland as a small, open economy.
- Globalisation has, by and large, been good to Ireland. Globalisation comes with great opportunities. But it also carries some responsibilities.

An opportunity for leadership

- We have welcomed that, at September’s UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals, Minister Micheál Martin recommitted Ireland to reaching the 0.7% promise by 2015.
- At the very important side event in New York : ‘1,000 Days: Change a Life, Change the Future’, we saw U.S. Sec of State Hillary Clinton and Minister Micheal Martin launch the SUN initiative – showing leadership in the critical issue of tackling hunger – specifically on the 1,000 days from conception to 2 years of age when food and nutrition is so critically important. In New York, we have shown – and seen proof – that a small country like Ireland can leverage enormous political influence, by using the expertise in its development cooperation programme to influence larger countries.
- We may well be witnessing a new era in Irish foreign policy: one where Ireland plays a global leadership role, and where our overseas aid programme provides us with a degree of influence well beyond what can be expected of a small country.
- This is a fantastic opportunity. An opportunity that merits investment.

That is why we need to safeguard our foreign policy with a plan to reach 0.7% by 2015

- Dóchas and the 70+ organisations in the “**Act Now on 2015**” campaign are convinced that our overseas aid promise constitutes a vital part of Ireland’s foreign policy.
- Our commitment to the world’s poorest people, but also to our European counterparts, requires that we deliver on the promise.
- We call on the Government to:
 - **Demonstrate visible progress in Budget 2011 towards the 2015 commitment.**
 - **Outline, within the four-year budgetary framework, the annual percentage increases towards Ireland reaching the 0.7% target by 2015.**
- We need international cooperation to help us out of our present difficulties.
- Our strategy to combat the recession is based on the need to repair the damage to our international reputation that has arisen out of the banking crisis.

- We now need to demonstrate that we are a country capable of keeping its promises, and willing to play its full role in global society. Through the aid programme, we are given a chance to do just that.
- The 4-year budget cycle that Ireland is now asked to deliver is a good opportunity to reflect our foreign policy priorities: multi-year budgeting is, in fact, precisely what Ireland has signed up to by endorsing this year's UN MDG declaration. The September MDG Summit called on UN member states "to establish, as soon as possible, *rolling indicative timetables* that illustrate how they aim to reach their goals".

The OECD has made repeated calls for donor nations to honour overseas aid commitments, and the European Commission has called for Member States to "establish *realistic, verifiable annual action plans for reaching individual targets...* [and] consider enacting legislation for setting ODA targets".

This support for Overseas Aid is not just from a well-meaning minority or institutions such as the UN or the OECD. A huge number of Irish people support aid, despite our current financial woes.

- A recent opinion poll, commissioned by Dóchas and undertaken by Ipsos MRBI shows that people in Ireland overwhelmingly support the Government's aid promises to the world's poorest people.
- The survey found that **81** percent of respondents **agreed** it was important for Ireland's reputation that the Government deliver on its aid promises – and to reach 0.7% by 2010.
- Across the country, and across age groups and social strata, the vast majority of people feel that Ireland has an obligation to assist those who are much less fortunate than we are, and that we must deliver on our aid promise.
- Our aid commitment has received **cross-party support in the Dáil**. Even in an economic downturn, people in Ireland believe that the economic crisis shouldn't be a reason for us to turn our back on the world's poorest people.

Aid works

- Finally and crucially: Ireland's aid works.
- As I have said, 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.
- In the pack that you have received today, you will find just some examples of how aid from Ireland is reaching the poorest people on earth - and transforming their lives.

Next steps

- As you prepare to take the difficult decisions in relation to the forthcoming Budget, we would ask you to build on the cross-party support that is there, in favour of our aid promise.

- We must ensure that the overseas aid budget is protected from further cuts. Over a period of 18 months there has already been a 24% reduction. So we see 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.
- The rationale to eradicate extreme poverty and inequality is clear.
- Political support now needs to be galvanised and acted upon, even in a desperately difficult Budget setting.

We ask of you today:

- **That you contact your Party Leader, and ask him to express your party's support for Ireland's aid promise.**
 - **Ask that your party set out HOW we can get to 0.7% by 2015**
 - **That you do your utmost to ensure that Budget 2011 does not further damage this crucial part of Ireland's calling card to the world.**
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- We *will* come out of the recession.
 - We now need to decide what type of Ireland we want to construct as we prepare to do so.
 - And we need to lay the foundations for the future of Ireland. A future that will, and must, lie in an active interaction with the wider world.

– please take the time to look at the pack you have received from us today; take the opportunity to ask my colleagues from NGOs here any questions you might have. We know that Aid works – let's continue to work together to secure a better future.

Thank you.