

If we “Act Now”, we can save Ireland’s overseas development programme, and our reputation as a country that keeps its promises, writes Hans Zomer, Director of Dóchas.

The world has agreed on what needs to be done

Ten years ago, buoyed by the optimism and ambition of a new century, world leaders agreed to a set of goals – now known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – to eradicate extreme poverty by 2015.

The Millennium Development Goals are a recipe to end global poverty, and an explicit agreement between rich and poor countries, with poor countries pledging to improve their performance, and wealthy countries pledging to provide the necessary resources. The Goals are achievable, and can be met in every nation - Governments must simply make their achievement a priority, invest the necessary resources and ensure accountability to their citizens.

Ireland has an obligation

Ireland signed up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, as an indication that we will not tolerate the extreme inequality in the world. We pledged to increase our overseas aid, so that we would reach the UN target of spending 0.7% of national income on overseas aid.

Unfortunately, the Government has twice shifted the date for achieving this international commitment, and now promises to reach the UN target by 2015 at the latest. Having broken two earlier promises, the credibility of this target is somewhat unclear, especially since the Government has failed to publish a plan on how it will keep our promise.

In September this year, world leaders will again meet at the United Nations, to review countries’ MDG performances. Sadly, it now looks like the Taoiseach will go to New York, without tangible proof that Ireland will keep our promise to the world’s poorest people.

Time for us to Act

This year, 65 organisations have come together in a joint campaign to prevent this potential failure. The campaign, called “**Act Now on 2015**” (www.actnow2015.ie) has a simple goal: to ensure Ireland keeps its promise to the world’s poorest people.

Ireland has often been praised for its overseas aid programme, and we have proof that our aid works. In more ways than one, Ireland’s calling card to the world is our reputation that will not tolerate injustice and human suffering.

But this reputation is at risk, as a result of the repeated cuts to Ireland’s aid budget, and as a result of the Government’s failure, to date, to provide a clear plan of action to deliver our latest aid promise.

As a country, we must act now, to restore our reputation, and to do the right thing.
As citizens, we must act now, and pressure our politicians to do the right thing.

There can rarely have been a better time to Act Now on 2015.

<http://www.actnow2015.ie/>