

# Response to the Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid from the Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Episcopal Conference – April 2013

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## Introduction

The Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Episcopal Conference forms part of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and is mandated to:

- Promote the social dimension of the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching, in cooperation with members of the Church and all people of good will;
- Advise the Irish Episcopal Conference on justice and peace issues;
- Respond to justice and peace issues in solidarity with the marginalised and vulnerable in our society and throughout the world.

In its work on global justice issues, the Council works in close collaboration with Trócaire. The response which follows seeks to underline key priorities, from the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching, which should underpin our response to questions of development and global justice. The Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this review of the White Paper on Irish Aid. As was outlined by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in a statement in October 2011, there is a need to take account of the rapidly changing global context and the implications of this from the perspective of justice and equality, ensuring the protection of the most vulnerable.<sup>1</sup>

## Core values

As the Consultation Paper rightly notes, Irish Aid is 'a practical expression of our values as a nation'. The Council for Justice and Peace, in its February 2011 publication *From Crisis to Hope: Working to Achieve the Common Good*, highlighted the significance of the values of solidarity and the common good in Ireland today.

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<sup>1</sup>Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Towards reform of the international financial and monetary system in the context of a general public authority* (October 2011).

One of the most positive and hopeful aspects of our current situation, highlighted in this publication, is that Irish people continue to have a very strong sense of solidarity and active citizenship – as evidenced, for example, in the support for charitable organisations, such as Trócaire, and the generous responses to several recent humanitarian crises. This strong commitment to solidarity has equally found expression through the work of Irish Aid, gaining Ireland an excellent reputation abroad for its defence of human rights and commitment to the most vulnerable. In the present time of economic crisis, there is a crucial need for this kind of leadership. It is vital that the Irish Aid programmes continues to manifest our commitment as a nation to solidarity with the victims of poverty and injustice, setting the example that the protection of the most vulnerable is not a luxury for times of prosperity, but a core element of our strategy for development on both a national and international level.

## Overseas Development Assistance

*“No one can in good conscience accept the development of some countries to the detriment of others. If no solutions are found to the various forms of injustice, the negative effects that follow on the social, political and economic level are destined to create a climate of growing hostility and even violence...”*

(Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2011)<sup>2</sup>

The principle of solidarity has its roots in our understanding of our social and interdependent nature as human beings. This interdependence is becoming increasingly evident at the level of nations as a result of globalisation. The impact of issues such as energy, natural resources, climate change, employment and migration is increasingly felt across the globe. Consequently, the need to address inequality needs to be at the heart of our development policy, of which Overseas Development Assistance forms a crucial element. There is clear need to recognise that increasingly levels of inequality between nations will generate instability and insecurity for all.

Whilst we welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government (2011) to honour the UN minimum target figure of 0.7% of GNP for ODA, we nevertheless regret that this target has been postponed yet again and will not now be reached before 2015. As we stated in *From Crisis to Hope* (section 6): "An acceptance of the global common good obliges us, even in times of economic difficulty, to maintain levels of Overseas Development Aid and protect the rights of the poorest and most vulnerable throughout the world". There are voices, at present, which argue that we should restrict financial flows to underdeveloped countries under

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<sup>2</sup>Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Towards reform of the international financial and monetary system in the context of a general public authority* (October 2011).

present circumstances, and concentrate on our own welfare. This argument is fallacious, as are all arguments based on protectionism, trade restrictions and autarky. The experience of economic growth in the past century has shown how welfare growth stems rather from economic cooperation and specialisation. Countries are not islands, any more than individuals, and we cannot abrogate on our responsibilities to other societies, either on moral or economic grounds.

## Key Issues

### *Achieving the Millennium Goals*

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have provided us with key milestones against which progress in development can be measured across a range of areas. As the Consultation Paper rightly notes, there have been significant improvements in key areas, such as poverty reduction. For many people throughout the world, however, goals in areas such as equality, education and health continue to appear a distant dream.

In the context of the current global financial crisis there is a risk that the MDGs may be seen as aspirations, rather than concrete targets against which the effectiveness of policy interventions is to be measured. The future policy of Irish Aid needs to contribute to keeping the focus on the need to achieve the MDGs. It must be acknowledged, however, that there is little time remaining before the current MDGs expire in 2015 and that adequate frameworks will need to be in place by that time in order to secure the continuation of this vital work into the future.

### *Gender Equality*

One area where the failure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals is devastatingly evident is the case of gender equality. Women in developing countries continue to be disproportionately vulnerable to poverty, violence and exploitation. Violence against women, on both a national and international level, is a priority issue for the Council for Justice and Peace.<sup>3</sup> We wish to underline, not only the need for targeted action to address gender-based violence, but also the equally important need to ensure that all aspects of the Irish Aid programme contribute to addressing the underlying causes of inequality and vulnerability for women.

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<sup>3</sup>See for example: Violence against women in war – we cannot remain silent (December 2008); Bishops' Commission for Justice and Social Affairs calls for new measures to protect women from the violence of trafficking (November 2009); Council for Justice and Peace calls for greater protection for women from sexual violence in war (March 2011) [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie).

## *The example of South Sudan*

For a compelling argument for the importance of the Millennium Development Goals we need look no further than the world's newest country, South Sudan. The case of South Sudan, a region rich in natural resources, highlights the importance of the Millennium Development Goals to the wellbeing of individuals, communities and nations and provides a powerful illustration of the extent to which the failure to achieve these prevents people in the developing world from lifting themselves out of poverty. The lack of infrastructure, such as roads, in South Sudan, combined with the on-going threat of violence and the proliferation of small arms, has left millions of people in this region extremely vulnerable. According to the World Food Programme and the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation, 890,000 people in the region are living in extreme food insecurity, and a further 2.9 million are living in extreme food insecurity.<sup>4</sup> The region has the second lowest ranking in the world for enrolment in primary school and the lowest for enrolment in secondary education, with females facing disproportionate levels of exclusion and disadvantage in this respect.<sup>5</sup>

This region, in which Irish organisations such as Trócaire and Irish religious congregations are already playing an active role, shows, on the one hand, the extent of the disparities in levels of development that continue to exist, and, on the other, the potential for the Millennium Development Goals to contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous future for all.

## **Conclusion**

In *From Crisis to Hope*, the Council for Justice and Peace argued for the need for any response to the economic crisis to be based on the correct balance between the principles of freedom, efficiency, solidarity and the protection of the environment.<sup>6</sup> There is a similar need for balance in regard to these four principles in the future of activity of Irish Aid. In times of economic recession the importance of ensuring value for money on investment cannot be over-estimated. In a spirit of solidarity, however, we cannot allow financial difficulties to weaken our commitment to human rights and the protection of the most vulnerable.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.wfp.org/countries/South-Sudan/Overview>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/gmr2011-policy-paper-south-sudan.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Episcopal Conference, *From Crisis to Hope: Working to Achieve the Common Good* (Dublin: Veritas, 2011), p. 12.