

**Tithe an Oireachtais**

**An Comhchoiste um Ghnóthaí an Aontais Eorpaigh**

**Aighneacht maidir leis an Athbhreithniú ar an bPáipéar  
Bán ar Chúnadh Éireann**

**Bealtaine 2012**

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**Houses of the Oireachtas**

**Joint Committee on European Union Affairs**

**Submission on the Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid**

**May 2012**

**Nature of Views:** On behalf of Committee members  
**Organisation:** Joint Committee on European Union Affairs  
**Role in organisation:** Chair  
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**Release of Response:** Yes  
**Freedom of Information:** Can be made available  
**Date of posting:** 11 May 2012

**Members of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs:**

Dominic Hannigan TD (Lab), Chair. **Deputies:** Paschal Donohoe (Vice-Chair) (FG); Timmy Dooley (FF); Bernard Durkan (Vice-Chair) (FG); Colm Keaveney (Lab); Seán Kyne (FG); Pádraig MacLochlainn (SF); Joe O'Reilly (FG); Mick Wallace (Ind). **Senators:** Colm Burke (FG); Fidelma Healy Eames (FG); James Heffernan (Lab); Terry Leyden (FF); Kathryn Reilly (SF).

## **Introduction**

The Government announced a review of the White Paper on Irish Aid in June 2011 with a public consultation to take place between 1 February and 26 April 2012.

Under its orders of reference, the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs is charged with considering matters relating to Ireland's membership of the European Union and within that, consideration of cross-sectoral policy issues such as that of development cooperation. In that context, the Irish Aid programme operates within the overall framework of the European Union and channels money through the European Union.

In the context of the public consultation, the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs invited Joe Costello TD, Minister of State for Trade and Development at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Nora Owen, Chairperson of the Irish Aid expert advisory group, to address it. The meeting took place on Thursday 19 April 2012.

This submission details the contributions of the Joint Committee members in the discussion that followed the presentations by Minister of State Costello and Nora Owen.

It was agreed that the comments of Members would be compiled together to form a submission on behalf of the Joint Committee.

Full details of the review and details of the consultation process are available at <http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/whitepaper/>

## **Progress Made**

The Joint Committee welcomed the timely review of the White Paper in the context of the evolution of challenges being faced both nationally and internationally. Published in 2006, the Committee noted that the White Paper was the first of its kind and had focused primarily on the basic essentials: reducing poverty; helping children survive their first years and go to school; enabling people to have enough food to eat; and enabling people to take control of their own lives.

The achievements of the White Paper were discussed, and the effective follow through on the majority of the 100 key decisions outlined therein was welcomed and noted. In terms of the areas where progress was less than expected, the Committee highlighted increased Oireachtas involvement, development education and public engagement as mechanisms to ensure and secure advancement.

The Committee welcomed the recommitment of the Irish Government to the UN target for Official Development Assistance of 0.7% of GNP. In particular, the Committee agreed that the tradition of Irish involvement in overseas development should be protected and maintained regardless of the prevailing economic circumstances.

## **Changing Context**

The Committee advised against suggestions that due to our current domestic economic difficulties, Ireland should reduce expenditure on overseas aid, in order to concentrate on domestic concerns.

The Chairman spoke of the immense improvements in Vietnam between 2001 and 2011. As a result of these improvements, the Committee noted that it might be more beneficial to now concentrate in other areas in Asia or Africa such as Cambodia. By targeting expenditure to areas of particular need, the effectiveness of Irish Aid can be maintained.

## **Key Issues**

In terms of improving public perception, the Chairman made reference to a study conducted which found that those questioned expected 4-5% of government spending to be directed towards overseas aid. In reality, the study noted that only 70 cent in every €100 of government expenditure is spent on overseas aid.

In this regard, the Committee highlighted the area of public education as one in which further improvements should be made. The Chairman noted that public representatives are repeatedly told that Irish people request more information on the impact of Irish aid programmes. While excellent progress is being made at student level, the Committee recommended that more must be done to reach out to wider society.

Furthermore, Deputy Kyne referred to the concern that some people may have when they donate in response to television appeals (in terms of how much of the donation actually reaches the target). The Committee was of the view that there needs to be more transparency regarding the percentage of Irish Aid which actually goes into funding aid programmes.

The Committee proposed that the process for selecting programme countries and once selected how progress with these projects should be more openly communicated with well-defined criteria. Furthermore, the process through which how and when it is to be decided to disengage from countries such as Zambia and to focus on other countries which would benefit from Irish Aid, should also be subject to similar evaluation.

The Committee highlighted the importance of agri-development programme in operation through Irish Aid as a cost-effective and efficient route is to assist those in need in an indirect way to help themselves. Such self-sustaining programmes should be prioritised.

## **Ways of Working**

Deputy Donohoe suggested that members sharing an interest in this area should have the opportunity to see at first hand examples of the projects that are funded by Irish Aid. Such an initiative would help build up a coalition of understanding of these matters within the entire Oireachtas, regardless of party and committee.

Based on a contribution from Deputy Durkan, the Committee noted that some agencies of the United Nations are more effective than others in the identification of sensitive areas and

spending money. Therefore, the Committee recommends that Ireland should develop, through Irish Aid and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, a positive influence on focusing on the most effective and efficient agencies to encourage more aid through such channels.

The Committee welcomed the proposal to use Shannon Airport as an international hub for storage and distribution.

### **Other Comments**

The issue of oppression of minority groups, for example the persecution of homosexuals in Uganda, was raised in the context of provision of funding. The Committee recommends that the Review should examine potential benefits of linking funding to requirements to reform such injustices.