

MEDIA RELEASE

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As we celebrate “Europe Day” (9 May), aid agencies ask EU to take decisive action on poverty

Next few months crucial for Europe’s foreign and aid policies

May 9 has been designated as the day of annual celebration of European unity and is more commonly known as ‘Europe Day’, marking the anniversary of Robert Schuman’s proposal on the creation of a unified Europe.

“Ireland’s development NGOs have been strong supporters of greater European cooperation,” said Hans Zomer, Director of Dóchas, the network of Irish aid agencies.

“If we are serious about ending extreme poverty, we must get European countries to work together. And the decisions to be taken in the next few months will determine whether Europe is ready and able to take on that task.”

The European Union is the biggest donor of overseas aid, and its “external policies” (such as trade, migration, and foreign policy) have direct implications for many of the world’s poorest countries. For this reason, Irish NGOs take a healthy interest in EU policy making.

“The members of Dóchas have expressed concerns about recent trends in EU discourse, down-playing the importance of social services and putting too much faith in the market to deliver international development. We believe that human development must be based on sustainable and inclusive models, addressing inequalities and protecting vulnerable people” said Hans Zomer.

As EU member states start negotiations for the future financing of the EU bloc (a process referred to as the “Multi-Annual Financial Framework” or “Financial Perspectives”), the political preferences of the day will determine in large part the political direction of the entire EU bloc for the next decade.

The current agreement, under which just over 1% of European GNI (1.048%) is spent through the EU’s institutions, dates from 2006 and comes to an end in 2013.

“The economic crisis means that EU member countries are unlikely to want to increase their membership fees. In fact, countries like Germany, France, the UK and the Netherlands have already insisted that any increase cannot exceed inflation. That means that any new European initiatives to tackle unemployment, climate change or energy dependence will have to come from the existing budget, and will need a reshuffling of priorities – in particular the Common Agricultural Policy and the Structural Funds, which together account for four-fifth of the EU’s budget” according to Zomer.

The Lisbon Treaty made development cooperation a distinct EU policy area, with its own, explicit objectives. In the current Financial Perspectives (2007-2013), this policy area sits in the “Europe As A Global Partner” envelope, which accounts for some 6% of the total.

“The EU’s budget for foreign policy and the fight against extreme poverty is likely to come under pressure as negotiations start in earnest this summer. We would like to remind EU governments that the Lisbon Treaty, and indeed all major EU Treaties since 1992, have put poverty eradication at the heart of what the EU is seeking to achieve. We must not undermine the progress made to date” concluded Zomer.

[ENDS]

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DÓCHAS MEMBER AGENCIES:

- A-Z Children’s Charity
- ActionAid Ireland
- Afri
- Africa Centre
- Aidlink
- Alan Kerins Projects
- Amnesty International Ireland
- Camara Education
- Centre for Global Education
- ChildFund Ireland
- Children in Crossfire
- Christian Aid Ireland
- Christian Blind Mission Ireland
- Church Missionary Society Ireland (CMSI)
- Comhlámh
- Concern
- Friends of Londiani (Ireland)
- Galway One World Centre
- Gorta
- Habitat for Humanity Ireland
- Irish League of Credit Unions International Development Foundation (ILCU/IDF)
- Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs (ICJSA)
- Irish Council for International Students (ICOS)
- Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA)
- Irish Foundation for Co-operative Development (IFCD)
- Irish Missionary Union (IMU)
- Irish Red Cross (IRC)
- Kerry Action for Development Education (KADE)
- National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
- Oxfam – Ireland
- Plan Ireland
- Progressio Ireland
- Self Help Africa

- Sightsavers International Ireland
- Skillshare International Ireland
- Suas Educational Development
- Tearfund Ireland
- The Hope Foundation
- Trócaire
- Vita
- Voluntary Service International (VSI)
- Voluntary Service Overseas (Ireland)
- Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM)
- War on Want Northern Ireland
- World Vision Ireland
- YMCA Ireland