

Aid agencies warn against cuts in funding

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Irish aid agencies today joined forces to appeal to the Government not to cut overseas aid in the upcoming mini budget.

Humanitarian workers fear the world's most vulnerable people will die if any more funding is taken from their books.

Dochas, the umbrella group of Ireland's Development NGO's, said the Irish Aid budget has been slashed by €155 million — 17 per cent — over the last eight months.

They said despite the economic crisis, spiralling job losses, and spending cuts at home, they appealed not to be hit again.

Noel Wardick, of the Irish Red Cross, said any loss of income will have an immediate and direct effect on the poorest people on earth.

“There is a concern Irish Aid might be seen as a soft touch, but these cuts are real and are extremely damaging,” said Mr Wardick.

“I genuinely feel if the impact is explained to people the vast majority will concur with us.

“Irish people are not that insular and never have been and I don't think they are saying charity begins at home.

“We would be urging the government to stand over its very well deserved reputation as a leader in the fight against poverty.

“Morally it will have some difficulty justifying itself if it doesn't.”

It is estimated up to 2.8 million children will die from hunger, disease and civil unrest over the next six years alone.

The government had vowed to contribute 0.7 per cent of its national income to overseas aid by 2012 — meaning donations will automatically drop during the economic downturn.

World Vision's Helen Keogh said previous cuts in aid have been disproportionate compared to other sectors and asked for equity and fairness.

“In Sierra Leone there is huge infant mortality and we are now having to delay projects there,” said Ms Keogh.

“The knock-on effects will be heartbreaking for the people there. Children are getting sick and they won’t have the resilience to beat it and will die.”

About a million people in the country already support the work of aid agencies by making monthly donations or sponsoring a child.

Austin Kenny from Concern urged the government and Irish people not to turn their backs on their work.

“We are talking about real people here,” said Mr Kenny.

“This year people in the Horn of Africa are facing the financial crisis we are all facing, but they have already faced huge increases in food and fuel prices in 2008.

“Some countries had a major drought last year and the signs are it is going to be worse this year.”

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