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KITTY HOLLAND

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DEVELOPMENT AID: LEGISLATION MUST be passed to ensure 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) is devoted to development aid, otherwise the 2012 target will not be met, Fine Gael MEP Gay Mitchell has said.

Speaking at an event in Dublin yesterday, where Dublin candidates for the European Parliament were quizzed by 44 non-governmental organisations on what they would do to fight poverty in the developing world, Mr Mitchell said as long as the Dáil voted every year on how much money would be committed to overseas aid, “we will never meet that target” of devoting 0.7 per cent of GNP to development aid by 2012.

The candidates voted on whether the aid commitment should be enshrined in legislation.

All present, except Déirdre de Búrca of the Greens, voted in favour of such a move. She said it would be “impractical” to enact the legislation.

Caroline Simons (Libertas) had left for another engagement, but Mary Lou McDonald (Sinn Féin), Patricia McKenna (Independent), Eoin Ryan (Fianna Fáil), Proinsias De Rossa (Labour) and Joe Higgins (Independent) voted in agreement with Mr Mitchell.

Mr Higgins said aid levels to Africa amounted to a “band-aid on the weeping wound of poverty”.

Mr De Rossa said he was particularly angry about maternal deaths and inadequate resources being devoted to reproductive rights.

Ms Simons said she would campaign for fairness in EU trade arrangements with the poorest countries. Ms McDonald said it was “critical” a European commissioner for development was appointed. Mr Ryan said it was essential malaria, TB and Aids were prioritised, while Ms McKenna stressed the need for transparency in aid to developing countries.

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