

Press Release

Wednesday 11 January 2006

“Decentralisation harmful for Irish aid”

Aid Agencies Warn Minister Ahern of Dangers of Relocating Key Government Service to Limerick

35 Irish aid agencies have written to Minister for Foreign Affairs Dermot Ahern TD to urge him to overturn the decision to move the Government’s aid programme to Limerick.

In a letter sent to the Minister today, the member organisations of Dóchas list the many problems created by the intended relocation.

"We feel strongly that this proposal poses a significant threat to the hitherto high quality of the Irish aid programme. The relocation of Development Cooperation Ireland to Limerick is not compatible with the Government’s commitment to improve Irish aid to the poorest of the poor" said Hans Zomer, Director of Dóchas.

He went on to say that *"We welcomed the Government’s decision to increase Irish development aid, to help achieve the internationally agreed Development Goals. The key challenge for Government and NGOs alike is to put in place structures and policies to ensure that Irish aid continues to be well spent. In our letter, we point out to the Minister that the relocation of the Government’s aid programme will damage the quality of the aid programme. Rather than improving the programme, this proposal will lead to a loss of expertise and will slow down much needed aid to the world’s poorest people."*

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**For further information, please contact
Hans Zomer, Dóchas Director: tel. 01 – 405 3801 / 085 – 728 3225**

NOTES

- In June 2004, Dóchas commissioned research into the potential impact of the move by DCI to Limerick.
In recent months, Dóchas criticism of the move has been echoed by the Advisory Board of DCI and by others including politicians, trade unions and academics.
- The integral text of the Dóchas letter is copied below.

Dermot Ahern TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Iveagh House
St. Stephen's Green
Dublin 2

11 January 2006

Dear Mr. Ahern,

Ref: Proposed relocation of DCI to Limerick

I am writing to you on behalf of the 35 members of Dóchas, the Irish Association of Development NGOs, to express our concerns about the Government's proposed relocation of Development Cooperation Ireland to Limerick.

As aid organisations, we feel strongly that this proposal poses a significant threat to the hitherto high quality of Ireland's aid programme, and is not compatible with the Government's demonstrated strong commitment to international development cooperation.

We have welcomed the Government's policy to reach the 0.7% ODA/GDP target by 2012 and are convinced of your own commitment to increase both the quantity and quality of Irish aid. We would therefore ask you to do your utmost to overturn this proposal, which will have a severe impact severely on the effective delivery of Irish aid.

At a time that the aid budget has reached unprecedented levels, the main concern of Government and Development NGOs alike should be to put in place policies and structures to maximise the effectiveness of aid management and attain the objectives we have set for the Irish aid effort: to eradicate poverty and injustice. In our view, this includes improving transparency, coordination, dialogue, impact measurement and the building up of a pool of expertise. None of these challenges will be made any easier by physically removing DCI from its Irish-based client base of embassies, NGOs, trade unions and Government Departments, most of whom are based in Dublin. In the words of the Department's Second Decentralisation Implementation Plan: "ICT offers some scope to enable more business to be transacted without the need for face-to-face contact However, it cannot replace personal contact and represents a less than effective alternative in some cases." We contend that this is one such case.

In the recently concluded national consultation process towards the White Paper on Development Cooperation, it became clear that there is widespread concern about the potential implications of the DCI move to Limerick. These concerns were echoed strongly by the Advisory Board to DCI, which stated that

DCI's ability to promote policy coherence and coordination will be significantly damaged by this proposal, and that in the short term a considerable loss of expertise can be expected.

More importantly, the relocation proposal undermines one of the core principles underlying the Irish aid programme, ie the fact that development cooperation is an integral part of Irish foreign policy. The political signal given by the relocation is that development cooperation is not a core function of Government and can operate in a vacuum, physically removed from its main stakeholders. Surely this is not a signal that the Government would intend to send out.

Finally, we would like to highlight the negative impact the relocation will have for the Government's efforts to strengthen parliamentary involvement in the development cooperation programme. Oireachtas committees can, in our view, be a potent instrument in promoting policy coherence and public scrutiny of the Irish aid programme. For the Committees to be able to fulfil their tasks, a close cooperation with DCI – and other players in the Irish aid programme – is required. The physical remoteness of the proposed new location for DCI will not endanger this process, but does nothing to encourage it either.

In conclusion, Dóchas members feel that the current proposal to relocate DCI is not helpful, and a threat to the quality of Ireland's efforts at combating poverty. We would urge you, Minister, to ensure that this proposal is withdrawn.

Yours sincerely,

Hans Zomer
Director