

Aid Agencies Welcome Debate in Oireachtas:

“Irish Aid capacity vital to implementing the White Paper”

Dublin, 2 November 2006

Irish aid agencies have broadly welcomed the government’s White Paper on Irish Aid, while cautioning that many of the policy directions suggested have yet to be worked through in detail and that the development programme needs to be properly resourced.

The 38 member organisations of Dóchas, the umbrella group of Irish non-governmental development organisations, welcomed the White Paper’s clear insistence that aid should benefit the poorest of the poor, as well as the new emphasis on Irish Aid as a central element of Irish foreign policy.

“The government deserves credit for the energy it has brought to developing this White Paper as a roadmap for Irish development assistance,” said Hans Zomer, director of Dóchas.

“The Irish aid agencies will work with the government to work out the details and mechanisms to ensure that we have an aid programme that really improves the lives of those it is targeting – and of which the Irish people can be proud.”

Dóchas members held a special meeting on 23 October to consider their collective response to the White Paper. Afterwards, they said they were heartened by the government’s clear commitments to giving 0.7% of national income to development assistance by 2012, and Irish assistance remaining “untied”.

Members also looked forward to making real the White Paper’s commitment to partnership. They noted that this would mean Ireland engaging in true development cooperation rather than any sense of charitable giving, shades of which still linger in the White Paper.

The importance attached to developing a “whole of government” approach to development was also underlined. When in place and really made to work, this should help avoid situations where the benefits of the aid programme could be undone by Irish stances on agriculture or trade, for example.

However, Dóchas members expressed considerable disquiet at Irish Aid’s continuing ability to deliver an effective aid programme without additional staff and expertise.

Members feel that the quality of Irish development cooperation is being threatened by a number of factors, including inadequate staffing levels for a rapidly expanding aid programme and a cap on recruitment. The number and scope of new initiatives announced in the White Paper can only add to the pressure.

The serious staffing restraints are also exacerbated by continued upheaval surrounding the planned relocation of Irish Aid to Limerick. For example, none of the 24 development specialists in Dublin is currently prepared to consider moving while issues around the terms and conditions of their employment are unresolved.

“We find it hard to see how the government intends to live up to its ambitions of helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, if it is not able to demonstrate how it will have the capacity to effectively manage the growing aid programme,” said Helen Keogh, director of WorldVision Ireland and chairperson of Dóchas.

“It makes little sense to commit significant additional funds if the government is not willing to provide Irish Aid with the staff numbers and expertise it needs to sustain the quality of its work.”

/ENDS/

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NOTES:

1) ‘Tied aid’ is given under the condition that part or all of it must be used to purchase goods from the country providing the aid, so that the money does not actually leave the donor country