



The Irish Association
of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations



OPENING STATEMENT

TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Wednesday 14 July, 9.30am

Introduction

Suzanne Keatinge, CEO, Dóchas

Chairman Flanagan, Deputies and Senators on behalf of Dóchas and our members I welcome this opportunity to engage with you on our Pre-Budget submission.

On the eve of the Dail's summer recess, we very much appreciate being before you today to give you a sense of urgency on the importance of Budget 2022 from the perspective of Irish international development agencies that make up the Dóchas network.

Together, Dóchas members - development, human rights and humanitarian organisations-employ over 5,000 people in Ireland and many more globally, supporting local communities in over 100 countries across the world. They, and their local partners, can be considered Ireland's global frontline workers as they work around the clock, often in very insecure environments, to contain the devastating impact of the COVID pandemic. As you will see then from the detail in our Pre-Budget submission, this is no ordinary year.

The pandemic has not only been a global public health crisis, it has shown the widening gap between rich and poor and threatened for the first time in decades, development gains such as the fight to eradicate poverty, and progress towards greater gender equality, including equal access to education for girls and people with disabilities. The pandemic has also allowed some Governments to roll back on their commitments on human rights, including protecting human rights defenders, as well as protecting civilians in times of war and respecting international humanitarian law.

We come before you today because we believe the pandemic, climate change and conflict are shared burdens that can only be resolved through collective action by Government, by politicians, by NGOs, by businesses and by local communities themselves.

Given the critical value of Ireland's international development co-operation, especially Irish Aid, and Ireland's diplomatic efforts on the UN Security Council, I ask the committee to formally contact the Government in support of our pre- Budget submission and in particular Minister for Public

Expenditure and Reform Michael McGrath, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence Simon Coveney and Minister for Overseas Development Aid and Diaspora Colm Brophy.

Our key ask is this:

- Now more than ever, particularly in light of the devastating impact of COVID, the Government needs to increase its spending on Official Development Assistance if it is to deliver on its “Global Ireland” strategy and Irish Aid’s international development policy, “A Better World” to leave no-one behind.
- Specifically the Government needs to increase ODA in real terms in Budget 2022 and offer a clear pathway to achieving 0.5% by 2025 and onwards to 0.7% by 2030.

We would *also ask* that all political parties represented here today, (as well as any non-party representatives) recommit to reaching the target of spending 0.7% of GNI on Ireland’s Official Development Assistance by 2030 in their own pre-budget submissions.

With your permission Chairman, I will now take you briefly through the other key points of our Pre-Budget Submission before welcoming Caoimhe de Barre, CEO of Trocaire who will introduce one of their partners, Gloria Soma, Director of the Titi Foundation, South Sudan, to share with you the reality of her work in South Sudan. Dominic MacSorely, the CEO from Concern, will then provide a short insight from his organization on the importance and impact of ODA.

It is worth recalling that the Government in its programme ‘Our Shared Future’ recommitted itself to reaching Ireland’s long-standing target of spending 0.7% of GNI on Official Development Assistance by 2030. We have also been encouraged by the continued support across the political spectrum to reaching this target.

However, it is important to remind the Committee that from a high of 0.58% in 2008 our aid spending fell and then stagnated. When the Sustainable Development Goals were signed by Ireland in New York in 2015, it had fallen to just 0.32% of GNI. It fell further last year to 0.31% despite the welcome cash increase of €30 million bringing the total amount to **€868 million**. The latest Government estimates are that ODA will be at 0.32% this year. This is below the average reached by many other EU member states in the OECD which is at 0.5%.

We therefore need to impress on this Committee that the Government needs to increase the pace of spending on ODA so that we do not let another year slip by. Time is no longer on our side. In Budget2022 Ireland needs to make more determined progress towards the promise of reaching 0.7% of GNI on ODA by 2030.

I know this Committee is well-aware that Ireland is recognized around the world for its principled and high-quality aid programme. We have previously mentioned that the OECD Development Assistance Committee in its peer review last year said that Ireland’s programme is “strong with many areas of excellence” and that Ireland “walks the talk” in prioritising the furthest behind.

However, the peer review also stressed that more needs to be done to match Ireland’s political willingness to reach the internationally recognized target of aid spending. In other words what we do with our ODA is very strong, and has real impact on the ground, but we need to do more of it.

It is incredible to think that we are still unable to physically meet with you today after over 15 months of COVID restrictions. Who would have imagined it this time last year? We regret also that for some of you, experiencing for yourself the amazing work of Irish NGOs on the ground has

not been possible because of travel restrictions. Nor have you been able to experience what it feels like to visit a refugee camp, or a village devastated by locusts or flooding, or indeed an urban slum in one of the many mega-cities mushrooming around the world.

But all of us here today understand and appreciate the enormous impact that the Covid pandemic has had on our lives and on everyone across Ireland. We all know families who have suffered bereavement, whose livelihoods have been damaged, and whose lives and future opportunities have been significantly altered. We appreciate too the massive long-term toll that the pandemic may have on our economy and society.

It is with this backdrop that I ask the Committee members today to live up to our roles as global citizens, and appreciate the devastating effect this pandemic has had on countries already suffering from hunger, conflict, drought and locusts. Quite simply it has become a matter of life and death, with frail and fragile health systems breaking down, and with people having nowhere else to turn.

Dóchas Pre-Budget Submission provides some devastating statistics on the impact of the pandemic, but also many positive examples on how Irish NGOs and their local partners are rising to the challenge, which my colleagues will share more of later.

It is by keeping these vulnerable communities at the forefront of our conversation today, indeed at the heart of policy-making, that Dóchas calls on the Government in advance of Budget 2022 to do the following:

1. **Increase Ireland's Official Development Assistance** to ensure Ireland keeps pace with global needs now and in the post-COVID environment.
2. **Ensure additional and targeted financing** for climate change mitigation and adaptation to support Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
3. **Use Ireland's voice** at the UN Security Council, at the EU and in other international fora to champion human rights defenders and the role being played by civil society.
4. **Advocate to ensure that the global community produces enough vaccine doses for everyone, everywhere.**
5. **Strengthen Ireland's global leadership on Zero Hunger.**

Thank you for your attention and for your ongoing support to Dóchas and its members.

Caoimhe de Barra, Chief Executive Officer, Trócaire

Put simply, humanitarian need is increasing. Humanitarian need was unprecedented even prior to COVID 19. Now, the triple threat of coronavirus, climate change and conflict are creating a perfect storm, threatening progress towards a sustainable future for everyone on this planet. As we know COVID-19 poses risk to us all, but the risk is not equal and it is the people in the most vulnerable situations, who are suffering the worst health, and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. The disparities in the impact of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minorities, indigenous groups and women are signifiers of deeply rooted inequalities within and between countries.

We are seeing the impact of COVID-19 across our programmes. In the two decades to 2020, the number of people living in poverty globally fell by 1 billion, to 613 million. However, the World Bank estimates that COVID-19 has driven an additional 120 million people into extreme poverty. Yet, according to the World Health Organisation, as of April 2021, richer countries have received more than 87% of the vaccines, and low-income countries just 0.2%.

We know from our own experience in Ireland how pervasive and devastating the pandemic has been, but for many countries, this is in addition to experiences of conflict and climate change. For example, Ethiopia is experiencing its worst hunger crisis in 20 years and severe drought and the impacts of global climate change are intensifying the situation every day. Along with the ongoing impacts of climate change, the current conflict in Tigray is having a devastating effect on the lives of women in particular who have been subjected to sexual violence, forced to leave their homes and left for days without food to feed their children. In Syria, humanitarian needs are peaking to the highest levels seen in the course of Syria's 10-year war—increasing by a staggering 20% over the last 12 months alone. The ongoing conflict and economic crisis in the region coupled with the Covid-19 pandemic has led to record levels of food insecurity and economic hardship. Covid-19 continues to spread at an alarming rate while the healthcare infrastructure, decimated by years of conflict, remains woefully inadequate to respond.

In response, Trócaire's partnership with Irish Aid delivers life-saving and life-changing programmes in some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the world. Through Irish Aid, Ireland is rightly regarded as a global leader in development and the protection of human rights. With Irish Aid funding, Trócaire reached 426,383 individuals in 2020 with support to mitigate the risks of Covid-19, including secondary impacts such as food insecurity and violence against women. Despite all of the challenges presented by the pandemic, we supported 2.7 million people in 25 countries in the last year.

In this context, ODA is needed now more than ever and we need more of it. Increased ODA is vital if Ireland is to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals, its climate and humanitarian commitments. Increased ODA is vital if Ireland is to continue to show principled leadership during its term on the UN Security Council. In order to meet the Programme for Government commitment to investing 0.7% of GNI in ODA by 2030, the increases in budget allocation need to start now. Ensuring that we do not lose major development gains due to the pandemic will be difficult but it is achievable. We have to respond to the scale of the crisis with appropriate ambition and action.

The effects of the pandemic are compounded by pre-existing drivers of humanitarian needs such as conflict, climate change, unsustainable food systems, human rights violations, poverty and inequality – including gender inequality and discrimination. I would also make the point that in addition to meeting humanitarian need we also have to address these root causes of humanitarian crises, and this is what Trócaire and other organisations do in our programming work, including

addressing conflict, advocating for climate justice, supporting climate resilience, addressing gender inequality and supporting human rights defenders. I will hand over to Gloria who will discuss this work in South Sudan in more detail.

Gloria Soma, Director of the Titi Foundation, South Sudan

I have worked in South Sudan for the last 8 years and have experienced first-hand the scale of the humanitarian need, but also the positive impact of development assistance on the ground. South Sudan marked its 10th anniversary last week. It's the world's youngest country and continues to face immense hunger, violence and now challenges of COVID-19.

The humanitarian situation in South Sudan is getting worse due to the cumulative effects of years of conflict and violence, climate shocks, including recurring floods and droughts, and now the impact of COVID-19. 8.3 million people are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2021, which is nearly 70% of the population. 7.7 million people are expected to face crisis level food insecurity or worse, this is an increase of 15% on 2020. Around 1.4 million South Sudanese children under age 5 and another 483,000 pregnant and lactating women are expected to be acutely malnourished in 2021. This is the highest number in three years.

The added challenge of the health impacts of COVID-19, along with the related impacts of lockdowns, rising food prices, unemployment, falling incomes and school closures – all exacerbated by a lack of access to vaccines – have really set us back. Economic pressures can often manifest in gendered ways, and approximately 1,500 teenage girls in the Equatorial States have been married off or are pregnant. The temporary closure of schools has disrupted children's education, limited access to services such as school feeding programmes and increased exposure to gender-based violence. Many girls who have left will not return to school. As ever it is the poorest who are being hit hardest.

Despite the rollout of vaccines that we have seen in Ireland, vaccine access in South Sudan remains low. South Sudan has received less than 900,000 vaccines via the COVAX system, and communities haven't been adequately engaged in the roll out process, which means poor uptake across the population. The weak health system of South Sudan is a further challenge to roll out. The importance of access to vaccines, Ireland's support for the TRIPS Waiver and public health support for the people of South Sudan cannot be overstated.

I would like to finish with the good news. The impact of Irish Aid funding in South Sudan has been immense. Trocaire's office in South Sudan, in partnership with local organisations like mine, have received just under €620,000 of Irish Aid funding in 2020 (and into early 2021) – with this, we've reached 18,495 people with a combination of support, including food assistance, access to safe water, agricultural support, psychosocial and gender based violence support, and menstrual hygiene kits, which help to keep young girls in school.

Lockdown came to South Sudan in April 2020 - between January and September 2020, my organisation saw over 6,000 reported incidents of gender based violence against women and girls. Through Irish Aid funded projects, cases of gender based violence have been identified, which have been reported and referred onwards; these cases would otherwise have been left unreported. Trócaire's programme on gender inequality has resulted in increased reporting of gender based violence cases, it has allowed us to push for more prosecutions of sexual abuse against women and girls. It has helped us increase economic opportunities for women to gain financial independence, to support women's participation in community peacebuilding initiatives,

and to build a flourishing women's leadership programme where women leaders support new and emerging leaders.

Real change can be delivered only by working in partnership with local communities affected by poverty and injustice. They know what works, they know what needs to change and are working to make this happen, they just need your solidarity to make this a reality.