



The Irish Association
of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

OPENING STATEMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

20 June 2023

Jane Ann McKenna, CEO, Dóchas

Chairman, Deputies and Senators, thank you for the invitation to meet with you today to brief you on the issues and recommendations outlined in the Dóchas pre-budget submission 2024.

It is only three months since our last appearance with you, but in that time a deadly and violent conflict has engulfed Sudan, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to flee war and seek refuge in neighbouring countries. The fighting shows no signs of slowing down and the human toll grows every day. Those still in Sudan are seeing their livelihoods, health and social systems deteriorate in real time.

This increasingly dire situation comes at a time when a record 240 million people in 69 countries need urgent humanitarian assistance. Parts of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are now enduring their sixth consecutive failed rainy season, which has led to soaring food prices and water scarcity, pushing millions of people into ever more extreme levels of food insecurity.

For Dóchas members who are working in and through local communities and organisations, the magnitude of the multiple crises and the chronic level of underfunding is having real and serious consequences. The gap between rapidly increasing humanitarian need and global funding is widening, forcing impossible choices as to who gets left behind. Decades of progress towards ending poverty and hunger are rapidly being reversed by a deadly mix of climate change and conflict.

The Irish government must respond urgently. Ireland stepped up to increase funding in response to the spiralling crisis in the Horn of Africa in 2022, and it is vital we do not step back now. However, funding is not the only need. Political will is needed to ensure climate targets are met, conflict is prevented, food systems work for everyone, and those furthest behind are reached.

Ireland should leverage its role as co-facilitator of the UN SDG Summit to influence wealthy nations and partners to constructively prevent and respond to humanitarian crises and to the diverse and complex drivers of these crisis including climate. Indeed, it is hoped that at the SDG Summit, governments and all stakeholders will announce transformative policies and measurable commitments to accelerate progress of the SDGs by 2030. António Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General towards urged world leaders to help deliver a 'Rescue Plan for People and Planet' at the Summit. Only a few days ago, speaking the UN HQ, Guterres stated 'We are hurtling towards disaster, eyes wide open – it's time to wake up and step up'.

The reality is we now have a choice to make. We can step up to what is being asked of us as a country and a global community or we can sleepwalk towards crisis. Hunger and malnutrition are not inevitable.

People capable of producing and earning enough food for themselves and their families are being starved – by conflict, climate change, and inequality.

Today I am joined here by Rosamond Bennett, CEO of Christian Aid Ireland and by Réiseal Ní Chéilleachair, Head of International Advocacy with Concern Worldwide both of whom will give you a sense of the urgent action needed in particular from those who are displaced as a result of conflict and those who are suffering the injustice of global unsustainable food systems.

I am also pleased to be joined virtually from Uganda, by Maurice Sadlier, Programmes and Policy Director with World Vision Ireland who will give you a sense of how climate change has impacted communities he has visited and spent time with this week.

We know that this committee has been a strong champion for sustainable development and for the calls of Dóchas and its members.

With that in mind we ask that you endorse the following key recommendations which we have outlined in more detail in our pre-budget submission:

- We appeal to the Irish Government to make real and tangible progress to reach our commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on ODA by 2030. We must make good on our commitment to spend ODA on those furthest behind in least developed countries and those worst affected by climate change and conflict.
- We ask for the urgent scale-up of Ireland's humanitarian funding to conflict-affected and fragile states, recognising that funding must be underpinned by policies that contribute to removing the root causes of crises.
- We ask that the Irish Government shows leadership through global initiatives to tackle hunger and deepens cooperation across all its departments to achieve our goals on hunger and Sustainable Food Systems (SFS).
- We ask that the Irish government acts on climate change on all levels, including delivering on the €225m per annum of climate finance committed at a minimum, with a view to rapidly increasing this allocation in response to the actual needs of low-income countries and in line with Ireland's fair share of climate finance.
- We ask that as part of Ireland's commitment to implementing the SDGs, both domestically and overseas, the SDGs are hardwired into the planning and budgetary processes across the state.

I will now hand over to Rosamond Bennett, CEO of Christian Aid Ireland, who will share with you her experience of her visit last week to Kenya and to the Sudanese border.