



The Irish Association  
of Non-Governmental  
Development Organisations

## OPENING STATEMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE 21 November 2023

**Rosamond Bennett, CEO, Christian Aid Ireland and Chair of Dóchas**

Chairman, Deputies and Senators, thank you for the invitation to meet with you today to discuss Dóchas's reaction to Budget 2024, preparations and expectations for COP28 and to update you on some of the most pressing humanitarian situations Dóchas members are currently facing, including the violent and shocking conflict in Gaza and in Sudan.

As CEO of Christian Aid Ireland, I may come back on those specific issues later, but first I'm very pleased as Dóchas Chair to represent the views of our network. I'd like to begin by recalling the key role Ireland played in co-facilitating a Political Declaration at the UN in September, calling for renewed global ambition and commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that "the SDGs need a global rescue plan", and in the declaration global leaders, including those from Ireland, committed to *'taking continuous, fundamental, transformative and urgent actions at all levels and by all stakeholders to overcome the crises and obstacles facing our world'*.

This is an important global wake-up call, in which Ireland played a crucial role. But we have not yet seen this same level of ambition here, including in **Budget 2024**. The additional allocation of €60m in Official Development Assistance (ODA) through the Department of Foreign Affairs is welcome, but unfortunately it lags behind both increasing humanitarian needs, driven by conflict, climate and hunger, as well as our own long-standing commitment to provide 0.7% of GNI in Official Development Assistance (ODA).

When in-country costs of resettling Ukrainian refugees are included, Ireland has announced that total ODA for 2024 would stand at €2bn or an estimated 0.48% of GNI. While the allocation delivered through the Department of Foreign Affairs has increased, the equivalent total ODA spend for 2022 was €2.3bn. Looking in more detail, and comparing against progress towards meeting the 0.7% GNI target, in 2022 Ireland's ODA excluding in-country costs for Ukrainian refugees was 0.39% GNI. In budget 2024 this is estimated to drop to 0.36%.

Despite the significant growth in Ireland's core ODA budget over the past ten years, it is not keeping pace with our commitments or indeed global needs. It does not go far enough for the people in dire need of humanitarian assistance in Gaza right now; for those devastated by the recent earthquakes in Afghanistan, or for those who have fled across the border from Sudan seeking food and shelter.

We have called for Ireland's ODA budget to remain focused on the Least Developed countries and countries worst affected by climate change and conflict, which is one of our great strengths. At a time when the world is on track to achieve only 15% of SDG targets, with regression or no progress on

approximately 30% of the targets, when over 70% of the world's refugees and internally displaced people come from the most climate-vulnerable countries and increasing numbers of civilians are caught in conflict, this is crucially important.

2022 was also a year of unprecedented climate disasters, making existing development challenges more acute. Many regions of the world experienced record-breaking temperatures, wildfires, droughts, and storms. From the floods in Pakistan – which left a third of the country under water – to the worst drought in East Africa in 40 years, countries that have contributed least to the climate crisis are facing its worst consequences. Decades of rampant extraction and burning of fossil fuels by the world's wealthiest countries, as well as failure to take the action necessary to reduce emissions, have driven increasingly frequent and catastrophic climate impacts.

The historic agreement to finally establish a new, dedicated Loss and Damage Fund (LDF) at COP27 is an acknowledgement that these impacts are happening, that those experiencing the worst effects are disproportionately poorer people in lower-income countries, and that wealthy, high-emitting countries must urgently provide new and additional finance to address it. Crucial questions still remain about how the new fund ought to start working in 2024. Ireland can play an important role at COP28 in supporting a fund that reflects the highest level of accountability and compliance with core principles of equity and historic responsibility.

Domestic action is also essential if we are serious about building sustainable food systems and tackling the climate emergency. To this end, we welcome the new and innovative €14 billion fund for climate, nature and infrastructure projects which we hope will support Ireland's transformation to a green economy. The ambition and innovation we have seen in this new climate fund for Ireland, could be replicated in a climate fund targeted at those communities in the Global South. This would allow Ireland to live up to its climate finance commitments as per our obligations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and ensure we are not diverting essential development or humanitarian resources from some of the world's poorest communities. Such a fund could target the real changemakers – local organisations, women's organisations, civil society organisations and governments who work on the frontlines of response.

Ireland has a reputation of always standing in solidarity, in word and deed, with those who are the furthest behind across the world. To live up to that reputation we need to see more ambitious and urgent action to ensure decades of progress towards ending poverty and hunger are not rapidly reversed.

Today I am joined by Finola Finnan, Director of Global Programmes and Deputy CEO of Trócaire who will speak to you about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and I'm very pleased to be joined by video link by Dominic MacSorley, Humanitarian Ambassador with Concern Worldwide and Country Director for Concern in Sudan. We hope our testimonies today give you a sense of the importance of Ireland's leadership, influence and essential role in reaching those most affected by conflict, climate change and hunger. In our very troubled world, it is essential to underline the genuine impact of Ireland using its ODA budget and its diplomatic weight to reach those furthest behind across the world.

We are asking that today you as the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence support our specific asks of the Irish Government:

- To make good on Ireland's commitment to spend **0.7% of GNI** on ODA by 2030 at the latest, and to ensure that those increases to reach 0.7% are targeted on those furthest behind in least developed countries and small island states, and those worst affected by climate change and conflict.
- To urgently scale-up Ireland's **humanitarian funding** to local organisations on the frontline of response in conflict-affected and fragile contexts, such as in Sudan and Gaza, recognising that funding must be underpinned by policies that contribute to addressing the root causes of crises.
- To advocate strongly, both domestically and at the EU level in particular, **for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza**, and ensure protection of civilians, urgent humanitarian access, and accountability for all violations of international law.
- To increase the **focus on Sudan at EU level** to address the devastating crisis in Sudan, to advocate for humanitarian access to those affected and those displaced, and to urgently scale up funding to respond to the many millions in need.
- Ahead of COP28, to act on **climate change** at all levels, including delivering on existing climate finance commitments 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 global targets.
- To make an initial pledge to help kickstart the new, dedicated **Loss and Damage Fund (LDF)** at COP 28, alongside our EU partners, and commit to developing a pathway to delivering our fair share of Loss and Damage funding by 2030 at the latest, in line with best estimates of global need.
- Lead efforts to ensure that climate finance **reaches those experiencing the worst impacts of climate change**, including women farmers, small-scale farmers, fishers, pastoralists, and indigenous communities to deliver sustainable food systems.

I will now hand over to Finola Finnan who will speak to you briefly about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and then to Dominic McSorley who will speak from the Sudan/Chad border.