

DEVELOPING NATIONS



FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP DEVELOPING NATIONS
AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ISSUE SHEET

We live in a world where ...

- 36 million people die every year from hunger
- One child dies from hunger every seven seconds
- More than 1.1 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water
- 2.4 billion people lack adequate sanitation
- 840 million people suffer from chronic malnutrition
- 42 million people are infected with HIV
- 14,000 new HIV infections occur every day
- 8,000 people die of AIDS-related illnesses every day
- Uncleared landmines result in 15,000 to 20,000 casualties a year, and
- There are an estimated 300,000 child soldiers.

While these statistics are daunting and represent major global challenges, there is no doubt that the most significant impediment to effectively combating them is the lack of commitment and resolve on the part of developed countries.

A recent UN report indicates that progress in eliminating hunger and malnutrition has "virtually ground to halt"¹ and there is evidence that more money is flowing from developing countries to developed countries, than the other way around².

In September 2000, all UN member states unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration, giving rise to the Millennium Development Goals. Among other things, the Millennium Development Goals aim to halve global poverty and the number of people who are in hunger by the year 2015. They also aim to achieve universal primary education and halt the spread of AIDS within that time. However, the UN has warned that the international community is falling well short of



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reaching the targets set in the Millennium Development Goals. As a relatively wealthy global citizen, Australia has a clear responsibility to provide assistance to developing nations and help ensure a more equal distribution of the world's resources. Yet for many years, the Government has failed to fulfil its obligations in this regard.

Australia's overseas development assistance (ODA) comprises less than half the level recommended by the United Nations and we are rapidly falling to the bottom of the list of donor countries. We were the only country to abstain from a UN resolution recognising the right to food³.

The Government's lack of commitment to helping the world's poor stands in stark contrast with the generosity of the Australian people, whose personal contributions to overseas aid have risen by 12.5% each year for the past 5 years⁴. The Government must increase its ODA commitment in order to fulfil its obligations under the Millennium Development Goals.



www.acfid.asn.au

The Democrats will continue to advocate for Australia's overseas aid to be increased, until it reaches the level of 0.7% of Gross National Income, recommended by the United Nations. Of course, it is also important that aid is effectively targeted and, in this respect, the Democrats concur with a number of recommendations made by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)⁵. In particular, we endorse ACFID's recommendations that the Australian Government should:

- Explicitly adopt the Millennium Development Goals as benchmarks for ensuring the aid program is directly focused on the sustainable reduction of poverty; and

- Produce a national report on its contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in time for the UN Review of progress on the Goals in 2005;
- Ensure that good governance development programs are balanced by increasing support for governance activities that empower local communities to demand respect for human rights and equitable provision of basic social services; and
- Identify and apply relevant and practical human rights benchmarks for participation, empowerment and representation of the poor and marginalised in all development programs.

(Footnotes)

¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, to the Commission on Human Rights, 29 March 2004.

² UN News Centre Press Release, 31 October 2003.

³ The United States was the only country to vote against the resolution.

⁴ Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), <http://www.acfid.asn.au/facts&figures/facts&figures.htm>

⁵ ACFID. Our Fair Share: meeting Australia's commitment to the world's poor by doing our fair share to halve global poverty by 2015, Submission to the 2004-2005 Federal Budget, February 2004.



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