

Advocating for Australian Aid

The Situation:

It is now more than 13 years since Australia joined with 189 other nations in making a commitment, known as the Millennium Development Goals, to halve poverty by 2015. There have been some spectacular results in some areas and some disappointments in others, but overall there have been great strides made in alleviating poverty.

Within a few days of the 2013 Federal election, the Australian foreign aid budget was targeted as an easy way to fund other election promises. Although stated by the new Prime Minister as “simply reducing the rate of growth” of the aid budget, it effectively removed or cut \$656 million from the aid budget this year thus affecting projects already in the pipeline. This is the single largest ever cut to Australia’s overseas aid budget. It reduces the aid budget from the aspirational goal announced by the bipartisan agreement between Labor (ALP) and the Coalition (LNP) of 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015, down to 0.32% GNI instead of 0.35% GNI previously allocated by this year’s budget.

With all the posturing by politicians, one could be forgiven for thinking that the Australian Government was extremely generous with their aid program BUT the truth is that the Australian aid budget makes up only a tiny 1.4% of the Federal Budget.

The Australian Aid Program had been touted as a world leader and received high praise following a review by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in February, 2013. The review concluded that the aid program has undergone impressive restructuring and renewal, putting Australia in the vanguard of the international donor community. The review also highlighted Australia’s increased focus on poverty alleviation and sustainable development, and improvements to the quality and impact of our development programs along with Australia’s assistance to development and stability in the Asia Pacific region. The quality and impact of Australia’s aid program has improved because we are focusing on areas where Australia has a real capacity to assist, and where there will be the most chance of impact, such as governance, health, gender and education, rural development and infrastructure.

The OECD review concluded that the program has been delivering better aid for the taxpayers’ dollar with the aid program playing a practical and positive role in Australia’s contribution to the stability and development of our region. Australia is playing our part in partnership with our neighbours, to help them reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development. The way we do that is to continue to make our aid program professional, driven by quality and focused on real impact.

www.aid.gov.au/MediaReleases/Pages/Australian-Aid-Program-a-World-Leader.aspx

However, Julie Bishop, the new Minister for Foreign Affairs has said the Coalition’s foreign policy focus will be on economic diplomacy, promoting the economic interests of Australia and Australian

businesses. International engagement, including aid, would be led by the department of foreign affairs and trade. The goal of AusAid, said Bishop, should be to transform relationships between Australia and recipients of its aid into “sustainable economic partnerships”, and a signature policy would be a plan to help Australian students live, study and intern in the Asia and Pacific region. www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/22/australian-foreign-aid-policy

This would appear to shift the use of our aid money away from helping the poor and transforming lives to a more strategic economic purpose that would be good for Australia’s bottom line, ultimately ignoring those people with the greatest needs and the least ability to help themselves.

What has been the response?

UNICEF’s Norman Gillespie says news of the foreign aid cuts came as a surprise. “This has come as quite a shock, the size of it, the scale of it and simply the giving up of the principle of a civilised nation helping those who are in extreme poverty and in need,” he said.

Oxfam Australia Chief Executive Dr Helen Szoke says the cut is at the expense of the world’s most vulnerable. “We know for example that still 1 in 8 people go to bed hungry every night,” she said.

“There’s still a job to be done and what we were hoping was that with a bipartisan commitment we’d be able to continue the momentum to actually doing that job and that will now be slowed down.”

Quotable Facts:

- AusAID reported in 2011-12 that as little as 0.012 percent of aid was lost to corruption. There are strict measures in place that encourage transparency and accountability in the aid sector.
- Two thirds of the world’s poor live in the Asia Pacific.
- One billion people in the world lack basic literacy skills globally.
- 2.5 billion people do not have safe sanitation facilities globally.
- More than 400 million people in our region live with disability.
- Almost 900 million people do not have access to safe drinking water.
- Since 2009, we have helped immunise 900,000 children in Papua New Guinea against measles and other diseases.
- We have helped immunise 288 million children worldwide and prevented an estimated 5.4 million deaths.
- We have helped halve malaria rates in Solomon Islands.
- Over the past five years we have created places for 330,000 children from poor communities to go to school in Indonesia and will create another 300,000 places over the next five years.
- Since 2009, in Indonesia, East Timor, Vietnam and Solomon Islands, AusAID has provided safe water to 600,000 people and improved sanitation to 400,000 people.

What does the Bible say:

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

1 John 3:17-18

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed", but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2:15-17

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. **Micah 6:8**

This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. **Jeremiah 22:3**

"He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 22:16

Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. **Ezekiel 16:49**

Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? **Isaiah 10:1-3**

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. **Proverbs 31:8-9**

He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses. **Proverbs 28:27**

He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God. **Proverbs 14:31**

How can we advocate?

1. Raise your voices and advocate on behalf of people living in poor communities. Check out the latest actions here: www.tear.org.au/advocacy/actions/stop-cuts-to-foreign-aid
2. Email your Federal member directly through the Micah Challenge website: micahchallengeadvocacy.org.au/email-your-mp
3. Phone your local Federal member and ask him/her to increase aid, not decrease it.
4. Enter the Make Poverty History 'Share Your Dream' short film competition to share your ideas on how to bring about change. www.tear.org.au/advocacy/actions/share-your-dream-film-competition
5. Run a small event and encourage others to join you in advocating!
6. Invite a TEAR speaker to address your group, event or church!
7. Use the quotes and facts in a mission spot at your church.
8. Share stories of effective aid and the communities who will be affected by this cut. You can do this by sharing infographics about Bangladesh, Cambodia, Africa, and Papua New Guinea (www.tear.org.au/advocacy/actions/stop-cuts-to-foreign-aid) on facebook, twitter, via email to your friends, or organise for them to go onto your church bulletin.

Quotes:

It's the greatest poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish. **Mother Teresa, Roman Catholic nun**

God has called us to be prophets for the poor and the marginalised and He has promised that He will be with us. **Rev. Kennedy D. Hanabalan, Executive Director, EFICOR**

The change the poor value most is something you cannot buy or even take a picture of ... it is the change of hearts. **Matthew Maury, National Director, TEAR Australia**

The Australian Aid Budget represents a small investment by the Australian Government, but one that provides huge returns in human welfare and improvements in stability, security and opportunity in our region and beyond. A cut of this magnitude – three months into the financial year – will have a devastating impact on the communities for whom the money has already been budgeted or committed. **Ben Thurley, Micah Challenge**

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children. **Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa**

Why is it that a child's death amounts to a tragedy, but the death of millions is merely a statistic? **Patrick McDonald, founder of Viva Network**

Let us be the ones who say we do not accept that a child dies every three seconds simply because he does not have the drugs you and I have. Let us be the ones to say we are not satisfied that your place of birth determines your right to life. Let us be outraged, let us be loud, let us be bold. **Brad Pitt, actor**

God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war. God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us if we are with them. **Bono, lead singer of U2**

There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed. **Frank Buchman, protestant Christian evangelist**

Over the past thirty years we have witnessed unprecedented progress in reducing poverty and improving the health and livelihoods of people around the world. Yet over one billion people still live in extreme poverty. Every day, 22,000 children under the age of five die from preventable or treatable conditions that have largely been overcome in Australia and almost 1,000 women and girls die in pregnancy and childbirth. Today, some 67 million children don't have the opportunity to attend primary school. These statistics are unacceptable. **Kevin Rudd, former Minister for Foreign Affairs (2012): www.budget.gov.au/2011-12/content/ministerial_statements/ausaid/download/ms_ausaid.pdf**