



Submission

Australia's overseas aid and development assistance program

Introduction

I am writing to you as the Social Justice Pastor of Seaforth Baptist Church, Sydney. Seaforth Baptist Church welcomes the opportunity to provide our submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee in its inquiry into Australia's overseas development assistance program.

In summary, Seaforth Baptist Church is opposed to the radical slashes to Australia's overseas development assistance (ODA) program.

We note that such cuts are in direct conflict with promises made by the Australian government in 2000 at the Millennium Summit. We consider that these cuts will have an adverse effect on progress made in the region towards poverty alleviation and sustainable development, and that the burden of these changes will be borne by the global poor.

We believe that such cuts run contrary to the message of grace, compassion and importance of social justice expressed within the Christian faith.

We also believe that this decision is not representative of our electorate, or of the Australian public.

We note the Inquiry's terms of reference and will address Terms of Reference A, B, D and E in our submission.

About us

Seaforth Baptist Church is a member of the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW and ACT. We have a congregation of approximately 200.

We are a member of the Micah Challenge Australia coalition, a global movement of Christian agencies, church groups and individuals which aim to deepen people's engagement with the poor and to help reduce poverty as an integral part of our Christian faith.

We are based in the Federal electorate of Warringah.

Our Church has enjoyed a relationship with the people of Manado in Indonesia since 2005 when we became part of the Manly-Manado community partnership, a partnership established to see the mutual transformation of the people in Manado and Manly. When

the partnership formally ended in 2010 we decided to deepen our relationship with the people of Manado by entering into a Compassion Church Partnership Program with Getsemani Baptist Church.

We entered the partnership as a long-term relationship that is not one-way but based on mutual respect and benefit. As part of this partnership, members at our church now sponsor 50 children in Manado and we support fifty mothers and babies at the Child Survival Program at Getsemani Baptist Church. We take annual mission trips to Manado and have been blessed to host the pastor and members of his family at our church in Seaforth.

Seaforth Baptist Church is also the organiser of the Manly-Manado walk in Manly, Sydney, which has occurred for eight years. The Manly-Manado walk is an annual fundraising and public awareness initiative focused on increasing partnership between the Manly community and the community of Manado on the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia, a community supported by Compassion. We estimate that since its inception, over 2,000 people have been a part of this initiative raising over \$240,000.

Our commitment to social justice springs from the call of Micah 6:8, which states: 'What does the Lord require of you? But to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.'

Psalms 82:6 also states: 'Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.'

Australia's ability to deliver aid against stated policy objectives and international commitments

'We recognize that, in addition to our separate responsibilities to our individual societies, we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. As leaders, we have a duty therefore to all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs.'

--- *Millennium Declaration, adopted by the UN General Assembly, 8 September 2000.*

We applaud the Australian government for its commitment to the Millennium Declaration in 2000 at the Millennium Summit. It has been recognised as 'a defining moment for global cooperation in the 21st century.'¹

We emphasise that if the proposed cuts to ODA proceed, Australia's international commitment to the Millennium Declaration will not be fulfilled as this commitment is being directly breached via such cuts.

¹ United Nations Development Group, *The Millennium Declaration and the MDGs*,
http://www.undg.org/content/achieving_the_mdgs/millennium_declaration_and_the_mdgs

We note that 'it is the collective responsibility of all United Nations member countries, developed and developing countries alike, to meet the goals and targets set out in the declaration by 2015.'²

As a step towards achieving the internationally-agreed aid target of 0.7% GNI, both the ALP and the Coalition committed to increasing aid towards 0.5% GNI by 2015. We note that the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister have stated that they remain committed to 0.5%, but with aid held at only CPI increases over the forward estimates and no timetable associated with this commitment, we do not believe this represents a commitment.

In 2005, under the Howard government, Australia gave 0.25% GNI.³ Under Prime Minister Howard, who committed to doubling the aid budget, this increased to 0.29% GNI and reached 0.35% in 2012-13. We note that during this time, Australia's provision was far outdone by other OECD nations that provided 0.7 % GNI from the outset, including Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

We note that the proposed cuts reverse the progress that was being made towards a committed timetable for increasing Australia's ODA to 0.5% GNI, and for the first time Australian ODA/GNI level has been reversed since Prime Minister Howard signed the Millennium Declaration in 2000.

What commitment will the Australian government make towards confirming a planned timetable to reach 0.5% GNI as a step towards reaching the internationally-agreed level of 0.7% GNI?

Consequences of these changes

We believe that the consequences of these changes will be borne by those who already carry an unequal burden.

Almost \$650 million of cuts mid-year will obviously have a negative impact on the individual projects that would otherwise have gone ahead or received greater funding. Without knowing the particular projects, we do not know the specific impacts. As the cuts are being borne by all countries, it is likely that this will have negative consequences for families and communities that would otherwise have benefited from health, education, agriculture and other assistance supported by Australian aid.

It is particularly concerning that in Asia and the Pacific, the world's most disaster-prone region, humanitarian and emergency aid, as well as support for regional and global climate-related and environmental programs, have all been substantially cut.

These cuts and the manner in which they were announced and carried out are also likely to have damaged the long-term predictability on which effective aid relies. They will also have caused problems in bilateral relationships with Australia's aid partners who have had to accept that Australia's commitments as a nation do not necessarily hold good even across the course of a single year.

² DFAT, Millennium Development Goals, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/un/millennium---development---goals.html>

³ UN Millennium Project, The 0.7% Target, an indepth look <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/press/07.htm>

Other related matters

‘We reaffirm our commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which **have proved timeless and universal**. Indeed, their relevance and capacity to inspire have increased, as nations and peoples have become increasingly interconnected and interdependent.’

... *Millennium Declaration, adopted by the UN General Assembly, 8 September 2000.*

We do not believe that the decision to cut Australia's overseas development assistance is representative of many in the Warringah electorate, the community in which our church is based.

On 31 August 2013, a large community event, ‘Halve Global Poverty’ was held on Manly Beach, organised by Seaforth Baptist Church.

Hundreds of individuals from across the electorate, including students, teachers, surf life saving organisations, churches and community groups gathered to form the words ‘Halve Poverty 2015’ on the beach.

Our aim was to raise awareness of the importance of the global poor and the need for Australia to stand firm in the commitments it made in 2000 at the Millennium Summit, to halve extreme poverty by 2015.

The Warringah residents gathered to encourage Mr Abbott to remember the global poor in his party's political agenda and urge him to increase foreign aid spend to ensure that Australia keeps to its commitment of helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which aim to halve global poverty by 2015. We estimate that over 3,000 individuals were involved in the event. The event had the national support of the ‘Movement to End Poverty’, a joint action of the *Micah Challenge* and *Make Poverty History* coalitions. The Movement to End poverty petition, which contained over 80,000 signatures from Australians across the country, encouraged Mr Abbott to increase Australia's overseas aid giving to 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2020, which equates to just 70 cents in every \$100.



At the event, this petition was delivered to the Hon. Mike Baird, NSW Treasurer, in lieu of our Federal Member of Parliament, the Hon. Tony Abbott, who was unable to attend the event due to other commitments.

We have also sought to raise awareness of the issue with the Prime Minister, who has acknowledged our advocacy as a church in his electorate.

In correspondence dated 20 December, Mr Abbott wrote: 'Thankyou for visiting my office and providing the gifts in my name to TEAR Australia. I am sure many families will benefit from the generosity of the parishioners of Seaforth Baptist Church. It is good to see that the Seaforth Baptist Church is a voice in our community for those in need.'

Decision to cut aid is not representative of Australian public

We do not believe that the decision to cut Australia's overseas development assistance is one that is representative of the Australian public.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade cites that 'Australians are the second highest private donors to non-government organisations in the world.'⁴

Indeed, the Prime Minister's local electorate of Warringah was extremely disappointed when just days after the Halve Poverty Event The Coalition Government announced the aid cuts. In representing the Prime Minister at our Halve Poverty event, Mike Baird said that the Prime Minister intended to "under promise and over deliver", however cutting aid when he had committed to an increase is not an under promise. It is a broken promise to the world's poorest people and the Australian people.

Australia's global position

'Success in meeting these objectives depends, *inter alia*, on good governance within each country.'

--- *Millennium Declaration, adopted by the UN General Assembly, 8 September 2000.*

We note that the success of these objectives depends on the strength of each country's commitment.

⁴ DFAT, Millennium Development Goals, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/un/millennium--development--goals.html>

We also note that Australia has emerged relatively unscathed from the global financial crisis, with national debt ranked among the lowest in the world. Other governments, including the UK Conservative Government, have seen the honouring of their commitments to the world's poorest as a priority, despite significant economic and budgetary difficulties.

Perhaps the Committee will be able to discover why it was possible for Australian governments, both Coalition and Labor, to be more generous in the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, when ODA/GNI was generally in excess of 0.5%. Why has the Government cut aid at time when Australia is a far wealthier country and governments' capacity to pay our fair share now considerably greater?

We note as well, that Australia's position on the UN Security Council is a privilege and responsibility whereby we have unique opportunity to influence other nations on an international level in calling for global responsibility and community.

If Australia fails to fulfil its international commitments to the world's poorest communities, we question whether other nations will follow suit. Australia has the opportunity to be a global leader in this area.

We believe that an increase to ODA to the original 0.7% GNI promised by the Howard government would be more in keeping with Australia's international commitments and obligations to 'spare no effort' to work towards global peace, cooperation and development.

We call on you to urge the Australian government to keep its promise.

Yours faithfully

Vikki Howorth (Social Justice Pastor on behalf of Seaforth Baptist Church)