

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

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Media Release

Good first step for overseas aid

The Federal Government has taken the first step in honouring the promise it made in 2005 to lift the aid budget to \$4 billion by 2010 – but this target remains well below what Australia should be contributing to tackling global poverty.

Make Poverty History welcomes the overall allocation of \$3.15 billion, which is in line with commitments made in the Government's White Paper on the aid program. We also welcome the fact that for the first time the Government has made firm, time-bound annual dollar commitments for the next four years.

"The Government has made good progress in supporting and expanding education in our region – an important factor in lifting millions out of poverty," said Make Poverty History Co-Chair Andrew Hewett.

"However, nothing can disguise the fact that Australia is still lagging far behind other rich countries in support for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In an overall budget with a massive \$10.6 billion surplus, it is disappointing."

Despite an increase in funding for basic health, the overall commitment is \$200 million short of Australia's fair share for addressing the critical issues of maternal and child mortality, malaria and HIV in our region.

"Also conspicuous by their absence are any strategies or funding to improve sanitation or increase access to clean drinking water. This seems an extraordinary omission given that 185 million people in our region are living without adequate sanitation – a major cause of death and disease, particularly for children under five," said Co-Chair, Tim Costello.

Mr Costello said the initiatives announced for regional deforestation and water management were also inadequate given that climate change will impact severely on poor communities, most notably those living in small Pacific island states.

"While the Government has indicated that more climate change funding will be forthcoming in future years, stronger action is needed now – otherwise we won't be making poverty history, we'll be making poverty permanent," he said.

In a Budget with a surplus of \$10.6 billion, or one percent of Gross Domestic Product, Australia is only giving 30 cents in every \$100 to aid delivery, this is less than half the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent GDP. After more than 30 years of successive Australian governments supporting this international target we're still waiting for them to deliver.

"While there is still a long way to go, this aid Budget provides a source of hope. It is encouraging to see the Government honouring the commitments made in the White Paper and we look forward to seeing further improvements and expansion of the aid program in coming years," said Mr Hewett.

"All eyes are now on the ALP to see if it will go further than the Government on international aid commitments, as Kevin Rudd has promised."