



## OVERSEAS AID

### FOURTEENTH ASSEMBLY, UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA Resolution 15.24.03

- 15.24.03 The Assembly resolved to:
- a) affirm that Australian development aid, funded by government, church and individuals, is an effective and powerful way of combating poverty and injustice throughout the world, thereby addressing the root causes of conflict, instability, people displacement and disease;
  - b) express profound concern regarding the recent cuts that will reduce Australian government aid to the lowest levels in our history;
  - c) call on the Federal Government to:
    - (i) restore overseas aid funding cut from the 2015-16 budget; and
    - (ii) announce a credible timetable to allocate 0.7% of Gross National Income to Australia's overseas aid program, commensurate with Australia's international obligations;
  - d) recognising that striving to set people free from the oppression of poverty and injustice is core to the calling of the church, call on all members of the Uniting Church to:
    - (i) use their rights and privileges as citizens to advocate strongly for increases in Government aid funding; and
    - (ii) increase their own support for development aid through personal and church giving, and through advocacy and encouragement of their friends and community.

#### **Rationale**

Australia's aid program reaches millions of vulnerable people and communities around the world.

Australia has also responded generously and effectively to humanitarian crises in more than 20 countries in the past year. Despite these achievements, the last 24 months have seen the most significant cuts to aid in the history of Australia's aid program. Since September 2013, projected aid expenditure has been reduced by more than \$11 billion over five years.

For the 2015-16 financial year, the Federal Budget delivered on a cut of \$982 million to Australia's aid program, taking Australia's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) down to 0.25% of Gross National Income. In 2015-16 total Australian ODA will make up only 0.9% of overall Federal expenditure – falling from around 1.2% in 2014-15. The 2015-16 Budget confirms further cuts of \$2.7 billion in the forward estimates with \$1.332 billion cut

in 2016-17 and \$1.377 billion cut from 2017-18. As a result, total ODA in 2016-17 will be \$3.912 billion and will represent only 0.22% of Gross National Income (GNI). This will be the lowest ever level since records began.

The decision to make successive and substantial cuts to Australia's aid program was not reflective of any review of the needs it responds to, its impact on the region, or the opportunity cost of significantly reducing it. Independent evaluations at the national and international level have emphasised the effectiveness and efficiency of Australia's aid program in recent years.

Rather, the cuts to Australia's aid program demonstrate that aid has now become an easy and expedient area for the Australian Government to cut. Though the aid program is only around 1% of Federal expenditure, it has been the source of more than 25% of the Government's budget savings.

What this ignores is the vital contribution Australia's aid program makes to solving the world's shared problems such as the effects of climate change, of increasing conflict and instability, of changing migration and refugee patterns, and global disease.

Australia is a prosperous nation surrounded by developing countries. Though we are in the top 20 wealthiest countries, we live in a region home to some of the world's poorest people.

It is in Australia's national interest to be in a neighbourhood of stable and peaceful countries with strong institutions, and where people have access to healthcare, education and essential services. We want to see a safe and peaceful region that can withstand the effects of natural disasters and provides employment opportunities for its growing youth population. A stable and prosperous region, free of poverty, with nations that can trade with us and invest alongside us is vital to our own future prosperity.

This Budget confirms Australia's position as one of the least generous countries in the OECD<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Council for International Development (2015) Federal Budget Analysis 2015-2016