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**Submission on “How Should We Tackle Poverty”?  
to Development Co-operation Ireland**

The Government is to be complimented on its decision to prepare a White Paper on Ireland’s official programme for Overseas Development Assistance (ODA)

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice wish to make the following points regarding future direction of the official policy on ODA.

1. Our Taoiseach made a solemn promise at the World Summit in Johannesburg to honour the commitment of our country to the U.N. target of spending 0.7% of Gross National Product (G.N.P.) on Overseas Development Assistance by 2007. As one of the richest nations in the E.U it is imperative that this pledge be fulfilled and that Budget 2007 implement the U.N. target of 0.7% O.D.A.
2. At the present rate of funding, Ireland’s contribution will approach 0.44% approximately in 2007. The U.N. report of 2004 on implementing the ‘Millennium Declaration states that O.D.A. has risen substantially since the Millennium Summit from €52.4 billion in 2000 to €68.5 billion in 2003. However, the High-Level Panel on Financing for Development, led by Ernesto Zedillo, sets the amount of annual O.D.A. necessary to help developing countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals at approximately €100 billion. This highlights the need for a rich country such as Ireland to adhere to the U.N. 0.7% contribution. The recent statement from Government that it will reach this target by 2012 sends a negative message to Irish people, implying the relegation of our commitment to help the poorest and neediest people of our world to a distant future.
3. O.D.A. assistance must be given in consultation with the people who are most in need. N.G.O.s provide a key structure for consultation with the poorest and most vulnerable people. Using the N.G.O. structure to deliver a considerable percentage of O.D.A., with inbuilt accountability procedures, will ensure that the assistance is targeted at the most disadvantaged people and addresses their crucial needs.

4. Ireland is one of the 189 members of the U.N. that endorsed the Millennium Declaration in September 2000. The 8 Millennium Goals which emerged from this Declaration set out definite targets to address world poverty, especially in developing countries. These goals form a coherent framework around which aid spending can be structured. All of Ireland's N.G.O.s, the Government's own Advisory Committee and a unanimous voice from the Oireachtas Joint Foreign Affairs Committee have called on the Government to honour the promise made under this commitment.
5. Government structures in each country are the obvious avenue through which to funnel aid. Delivering aid through these channels demands clear accountability that the receiving Governments respect human rights and adhere to the principle of good governance while directing aid to health, education, housing and transport infrastructure to help the poorest people within their country.
6. Aid that targets self-help projects best serve the dignity of people who are struggling to eke out a livelihood for themselves and their families. Financial aid should be directed specifically to those projects that enable people create a sustainable way of living for themselves, their families and their environment.
7. Unfair trade practices prevent a level playing field for developing countries to utilize their comparative advantage, particularly in agriculture and textiles. The European Union's Economic Partnership Agreements, will if operative, penalise the poorest countries in areas of trade and access to markets. The Government's overseas aid policy must defend the rights of developing nations to trade justice and fair markets. Irish ministers must lobby to defeat the ratification of the Economic Partnership Agreements that are due to become operative in 2007.
8. Ireland urgently needs a comprehensive, integrated overseas development assistance policy. Its record in terms of per-capita spending on foreign aid compares favourable with the majority of our E.U. partners. But it is not good enough. Growth in our economy has left us one of the richest nations in the world. Now it is essential to be focused, realistic, and honourable in assisting the world's poorest people to attain a life of dignity, free from poverty and that offers a future of hope for their children. In summary, our Government can ensure this by:
  - Reaching the 0.7% U.N. target for O.D.A. by 2007.
  - Consult with N.G.O. s to establish the genuine needs of the poorest people.
  - Funnel funds through N.G.O.s, putting accountability structures in place.
  - Ensure Governments in developing countries spend the aid on key areas of health, education, transport, etc
  - Adapt the 8 Millennium Goals as a structure around which to spend grant aid
  - Direct aid towards self-help projects.
  - Lobby against the E.P.A. s
  - Draw up a transparent, integrated policy on O.D.A.