

## Views submitted by Fr Tom McCabe omi on behalf of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

### **SUBMISSION BY MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE TO IRISH AID WHITE PAPER REVIEW April 2012**

#### **1. Progress since the last White Paper.**

1.1. The present White Paper review takes place against a radically altered economic context compared with that which pertained when the last White Paper was published in September 2006. In spite of a high level of support from the Irish taxpaying public towards development aid, the exchequer allocation for ODA has dropped by 27% since 2008, compared with an average percentage reduction of 9% across all government departments. Irish Aid, and its partner implementing agencies, have had a difficult time managing this cutback so as to minimise the adverse impact on the most vulnerable, while at the same time ensuring that aid quality and results are maintained and enhanced, in line with the commitments given at the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.

1.2. We hope that we are now emerging from this period of contraction, because what the aid programme now requires is a period of consolidation and multi-annual predictability. Otherwise the damage to Ireland's international reputation which has already been sustained, as a result of the excesses of the Celtic Tiger period culminating in the 'Bail-out' of November 2010, will be compounded, and disproportionate suffering will be caused to so many of the poor and destitute throughout the developing world, who depend on us to be reliable partners with them in creating a better quality of life. It is therefore all the more timely and important that the the present public consultation exercise around the White Paper Review is taking place, and that it is actively promoting public engagement with, and critique of, our development aid programme and its modalities of delivery.

## 2. Changing Context

2.1. Looking back over the past 5 years, one policy initiative which we particularly welcome is the Report of the Hunger Task Force, and the follow up action taken by Irish Aid, by development NGOs, and by missionary organisations to place a renewed emphasis on sustainable livelihoods as a key factor in sustainable development.

2.2. The Irish Aid programme has been characterized by many positive features, including:

- ✓ An over-arching objective of poverty reduction accompanied by strong pro-poor targeting of aid;
- ✓ Giving real expression to a development approach which is increasingly Southern led and promoting greater Southern ownership;
- ✓ Recognition that civil society organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation.

**These principles should now also be incorporated into the revised White Paper,** thereby underlining our collective adherence not just to good development practice, but beyond that to a range of international commitments to which we have signed up; for example - human rights, decent work, gender equality, environmental sustainability, combating human trafficking, and social inclusion of persons with disability. Abuses of fundamental rights often take place within national borders and are perpetrated against ethnic or religious minorities; for example recently our Development Office got a request from Pakistan seeking assistance to educate the children of enslaved brick kiln workers. All too often, national governments resist international scrutiny by invoking as a pretext the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs; however these latter principles should in the final analysis be superseded by the over-riding imperative of respect for universal human rights and protection of the child.

2.3. Over the past 3-4 years, we have seen the ravaging effects on our own standards of living of unregulated speculative hyper-activity in global investment, finance and capital markets. Unfortunately the structural injustice which underlay this flawed system is not confined to the corporate banking and property sectors, but pervades the global patterns of mineral extraction and natural resource exploitation. The raw materials on which much of Europe's (and Ireland's) economic activity depends, are often sourced through unethical practices in the developing countries, and are often extracted at great expense to the local populations and to their environment e.g. coltan on which much of mobile phone technology is based and from which we indirectly benefit through companies based here.

2.4. The concept of '**economic justice**' is a potentially powerful one. It offers the basis upon which Ireland should take a more forthright position on the international stage to combat such structural injustice. This should become the core concept to underpin the new White Paper, and at the same time it should become the core value whereby Ireland pursues a more unified policy stance embracing both Aid and Trade.

### **3. Key Issues**

3.1. As the passing of time takes its inevitable toll on the numbers of Irish-born missionaries active and working in the field, we feel it is vital for the Irish Government to declare its commitment in the forthcoming White Paper to maintaining its co-funding to the development work of the missionary congregations. This is necessary and desirable for the following reasons:

- (a) Maintaining a partnership relationship (through Mísean Cara) with local missionary organisations will provide Irish Aid and Mísean Cara with a unique network of valuable direct entry points into disadvantaged urban

and rural communities, which may otherwise be at risk of neglect, and where the needs are often most pronounced;

- (b) Processes of planned succession and hand-over to local personnel and institutions are in danger of being jeopardised if the perception in the field were to grow that Irish funding was linked to the presence there of Irish personnel; reputational damage to Ireland's credibility would then result.
- (c) The missionary links continue to constitute a modest but important element of the Civil Society strand of Irish Aid's funding, which itself complements (rather than duplicates) the official level channels for aid disbursement; this broad aid architecture has stood the test of time and merits continuation. After all, the validity and effectiveness of the work itself is what really counts, rather than the nationality of the intermediaries on the ground.

3.2. One important dimension which has **not** been sufficiently to the fore of our aid programme has been the area of **conflict resolution, stabilization of fragile states, and sustainable peace-building**. It was good to see some recognition of this as a priority at the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness last November 2011. It is a truism to say that there can be no sustainable development without peace, and Ireland has more authority than many to engage meaningfully in conflict resolution initiatives, having itself had to grapple with the complexities and the oscillations of our own peace process. While each conflict situation needs to be approached on its own terms, there are valuable insights, lessons and skills around peace-building to be derived from our own pathway to relative peace on this island, and to be shared with others living amidst conflict.

3.3. The Oblates, being an international congregation, are particularly sensitive to this unmet need, in view of our presence in numerous conflict zones, including Haiti, DRC, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe. Furthermore, from our work on the ground in countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Nigeria, we are very conscious of the need to intensify Christian-Muslim dialogue, in the interests of shared ownership of the development process in-country, as well as creating a climate of opinion conducive to genuinely peaceful coexistence and conflict prevention.

3.4. In spite of the inextricable link between development and peace-building, the inclusion of a conflict resolution strand in Irish Aid's country programmes has until now been more the exception than the rule (Liberia and Timor Leste being the exceptions). There is clearly scope for much greater and more systematic mainstreaming of conflict resolution theory and practice throughout the Irish Aid programme, which would further enhance its quality and distinctiveness. The forthcoming White Paper offers a significant opportunity to position Irish Aid at the forefront of new thinking and practice in this area, and at the same time maintaining continuity with our international involvement in peace-keeping operations over decades past.

#### **4. Ways of Working.**

While we recognize the benefits conferred by a focus on results-based management, the new White Paper needs to caution against unrealistic expectations that tangible and verifiable results are to be expected within a short period of a few years. This caution is particularly necessary in situations where our work on the ground is concerned with behavioural and attitudinal change (for example, child protection in situations where domestic violence is rampant, or around the social inclusion of persons with disabilities), in education (where combating educational disadvantage is a long-term process), and where deprived communities are up against powerful and entrenched oligarchies. In these kinds of situations, a longer time scale is needed for the impact to become discernible, and the criteria need to be sufficiently broad to reflect both economic benefits and the less tangible social benefits. Also, we have experienced problems in the past in getting project funding for work with a conflict prevention or mitigation component, because such work was not seen to confer 'development results'. The White Paper is an opportunity to take a fresh look at this important issue, in the light of the inter-dependence between peace and development (discussed in paragraphs 3.2. and 3.3 above).

END

