

26 October 2020

Open letter to the incoming government.



Time to fix 50 years of a broken promise to the world.

As the new government forms and puts together its plans for the term ahead, the world around us is facing big challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and runaway climate destruction. The need to work together to overcome global challenges is not new, but it is urgent. COVID-19 has shown us all what a worldwide crisis looks like. But it's also given us an opportunity to show that we really are united, and the strength of our actions when we're truly all in it together.

Fifty years ago this month at the United Nations a group of countries including New Zealand pledged to provide financial support to countries that needed help. This promise reflected a shared commitment to build a world where everyone can both survive, and thrive. That commitment still exists today, but the need is even greater, and the amount of aid isn't keeping up.

Too many of those countries didn't keep their promise: New Zealand has never reached the pledged target of 0.7% of its gross national income (GNI) to overseas aid. At a time of global crisis, it is high time this changed.

Aid is effective. During the past 50 years, it has been a crucial tool to support the development of countries that need it, helping them to nurture their people with the tools and systems necessary to stop and prevent hardship and injustice.

As aid agencies with decades of experience spanning the globe, we have seen great progress thanks to aid. Aid has helped millions of children in the poorest countries, particularly girls, get to school. Aid has saved millions of lives, not only through emergency assistance in disasters, but also by helping to eradicate polio in Africa and getting people living with HIV and malaria the medicines they needed.

But international aid hasn't kept up with the challenges. If countries had delivered the promise of giving 0.7% of their GNI to international aid, trillions more dollars would have been delivered. We would all live in a better, healthier and more prosperous world today. Not all problems would have been solved, but much more progress could have been achieved.

The last New Zealand government did increase foreign aid. That aid has helped to prevent and address violence against women, through practical actions like training police and supporting women's groups. Our aid contributed to the re-establishment of crucial government institutions in Solomon Islands after the civil conflict in the early 2000s that saw armed militia roaming the capital's streets. We have built water tanks, roads and solar panels, so that people in countries across the Pacific and beyond – particularly women and girls – don't have to walk miles carrying water, can get their goods to market, and can enjoy

electricity to do their homework when it gets dark. When given well, aid works. But the challenges keep coming and our generosity needs to keep pace.

We are asking our government to increase their contribution with:

- a 20% boost to New Zealand's overseas aid over the next three years, and for it to focus more on health, social protection and building resilience
- a doubling of our funding for climate action overseas
- a clear timeframe for New Zealand to finally keep its promise and reach 0.7% of GNI to overseas aid.

Now is the time to get this right. During the coronavirus pandemic, New Zealand showed the world that it was possible for a country and its leaders to put people first, and still have a functioning economy. We can do the same with aid.

In places where poverty and discrimination lock down people's potential, New Zealand's aid opens critical pathways towards people's well-being, allowing them to offer their unique contribution to the world. Our aid can provide support when people lose their job or income in the recession, and enable people to grow drought resistant crops or get warning when a super-storm is on its way. Our aid can build robust health services, including those needed to distribute and administer a coronavirus vaccine, free for all.

The best time to step up and keep our promise to the world was fifty years ago. The second-best time is now.

Signed by:

Anglican Diocese of Wellington

Christian World Service

Oxfam New Zealand

World Vision New Zealand

Care

Christian Blind Mission

Engineers Without Borders NZ

Fairtrade Australia New Zealand

Family Planning New Zealand

Hagar New Zealand

Rotary New Zealand World Community Service

Tearfund

Trade Aid

UnionAid