

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Australian aid budget slashed to lowest ever levels**

The Micah Challenge coalition strongly condemns the savage cuts to Australia's aid program confirmed in last night's budget. The Government is implementing the largest ever cuts to aid in Australia's history – including a \$1 billion cut from the aid budget immediately, and a total of \$3.7 billion being stripped from aid over the next three years. These cuts will take Australia's aid to the lowest ever levels in our nation's history.

"This is a deeply ungenerous and short-sighted act," said Micah's Challenge's National Coordinator Ben Thurley. "The world's most vulnerable people are yet again being asked to pay for our Government's skewed priorities as it balances its budget on the backs of the poor."

Aid to Bangladesh was cut by \$28 million (40%) which will severely affect programs which are helping the poorest girls and boys access primary education and supporting the poorest and most vulnerable families with income support and livestock. Aid to Vietnam was cut by \$39 million (40%), which will have huge impacts on programs to increase access to clean water and sanitation, support communities to adapt to climate change, and help to build infrastructure needed for economic growth.

"At a time when Australia has a growing economy worth \$1.6 trillion and the sixth lowest debt in the world, it is shameful that we are making such savage cuts to aid," said Mr Thurley.

The cuts to the aid budget mean that Australia's aid levels will now fall to 0.22% of national income by next year. This amounts to less than 1% of Federal Government expenditure dedicated to supporting our poorest neighbours and helping address global challenges.

"The impact of disasters like the Nepal Earthquake and Cyclone Pam, epidemics such as Ebola or Tuberculosis, and the challenges the world faces in generating inclusive economic growth and responding to climate change all remind us how interconnected our world is," said Mr Thurley.

"It is deeply shameful that our response to those challenges is ungenerous and counterproductive. While we are increasing spending on defence, intelligence, and asylum-seeker deterrence and detention, we are cutting Australian aid which helps provide hope and opportunity for so many."

According to Mr Thurley there appears to be no link between the cuts and the effectiveness or quality of our aid to different countries. While countries in the Pacific were largely spared any cuts, countries in Asia – including countries with enormous levels of poverty and challenges facing them, such as Bangladesh, Laos or Indonesia – all saw their aid cut by 40%. Only Cambodia and Nepal escaped drastic cuts – largely because Cambodia has agreed to help Australia process refugees and because Nepal has just suffered its most devastating earthquake in over 80 years.

Aid to Sub-Saharan Africa, where the world's absolute poorest people live, was cut by 70%. Three years ago, Australian aid to Sub-Saharan Africa was over \$240 million. Today our aid to that entire region will be only \$31.8 million.

“This decision cannot be justified based on need. Roughly one in every three people in the region are undernourished and almost half the population live below the international abject poverty line. It cannot be justified based on aid effectiveness either. Australia’s aid programs in Africa have been extremely effective in supporting agricultural development, providing clean water and sanitation, and responding to emergencies,” said Mr Thurley.

“We believe these unprecedented and brutal aid cuts completely contradict the biblical call for leaders to prioritise justice, mercy and protection of the poor and vulnerable. Now, more than ever is a critical time for Australian Christians to partner with others and stand up for this life-changing work.”

*The Micah Challenge coalition of Christian aid and development organisations is partnering with Make Poverty History in a national Campaign for Australian Aid. To take action and join the campaign visit [www.isthebudgetfair.com](http://www.isthebudgetfair.com) or [www.australianaid.org](http://www.australianaid.org).*

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**Ben Thurley, Micah Challenge’s National Coordinator, is available for interviews.**

**Media Enquiries:**

Angela Owen – Media and Communications Coordinator, Micah Challenge  
M: 0422 985 288 | E: [angela.owen@micahchallenge.org.au](mailto:angela.owen@micahchallenge.org.au)

*Micah Challenge is a coalition of church and Christian organisations speaking together for global justice and a world free from poverty. [www.micahchallenge.org.au](http://www.micahchallenge.org.au)*