

GREET YOUR MP WITH A GOAT THIS CHRISTMAS

Individuals, churches, schools and community groups are encouraged to send a card to their MP this Christmas and use 'the power of the pen' to advocate for the world's poor, in a joint campaign of the Micah Challenge and Make Poverty History coalitions.

"In this digital age, when petitions can gather signatures from across the globe in seconds, a handwritten note still has enormous political power," said John Beckett, National Coordinator of Micah Challenge Australia.

"As we approach the Christmas season, we're encouraging people to take the time to write and send a card to their federal politician, asking them to stand for a generous and effective contribution to ending extreme global poverty," said Mr Beckett.

With the Coalition Government recently announcing it will cut \$4.5 billion from the foreign aid budget over the next four years, including \$656 million over this year's budget cycle, aid advocates across the country will express their concern over the aid cuts and urge MPs to take a stand for generosity and justice.

Along with writing their MP a Christmas card, advocates are encouraged to include a gift from one of Micah Challenge's partner agencies' catalogues which could include malaria prevention in Zambia, goats for families in Nepal or skills training for women in Bangladesh.

"By making a personal contribution to ending poverty on behalf of our MPs, we can show our leaders that Australians are committed to generosity towards the poor, that we're practicing that generosity and that it's our desire see that reflected in our national Parliament as well," said Mr Beckett.

According to Mr Beckett, the campaign aims to provide supporters with a positive avenue to build a relationship with their MP, many of whom are new to the job, as well as highlight the effectiveness of Australian aid and the impact of the proposed cuts for the world's poorest.

"What better time than Christmas, when we celebrate the generosity of God in sending his Son Jesus into the world, to highlight the need for our leaders to also be people who practise generosity," said Mr Beckett.

The genesis of the campaign concept came from 19-year-old university student, Jemma Payne, who lives in the Sutherland Shire of Sydney and is a member of Gymea Baptist Church.

Originally stemming from feelings of frustration and disappointment after the Coalition announced it would cut the foreign aid budget by \$4.5 billion just prior to the election, the Creative Arts student at Wollongong University decided that a combination of advocacy and

donation could send a memorable message to politicians of Australians' concern for generosity.

"I was really upset and felt really helpless about the amount being cut, but I began to think about the powerful impact we could have on our national Parliament if we all did something that showed sincerity and conviction – like sending a charity gift to our MPs," said Ms Payne.

According to Ms Payne, who has been advocating on issues of concern since primary school, taking significant personal action on something you care about may be daunting, but can reap powerful results.

"Online campaigns and petitions have their place when it comes to being generally informed about what's going on in the world ... but making the extra effort to send a handwritten message or go to an event is a very powerful way of showing the Government you feel strongly about something."

If you or your church would like to get involved in the campaign this Christmas, go to www.micahchallenge.org.au/christmas-action.

Image caption: *Jemma and members of Gymea Baptist Church write their first Christmas card to local MP and Minister for Immigration Scott Morrison.*

High res images available here: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xf4e7ayt80jcpk/xZj2kSnmHI>.

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Available for interviews:

- John Beckett, Micah Challenge's National Coordinator.
- Jemma Payne, Wollongong University student.

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Micah Challenge is a global movement of Christians speaking out against poverty and injustice in support of the Millennium Development Goals. In Australia, more than 50 aid and development agencies, as well as churches, schools, groups and individual Christians endorse the campaign. www.micahchallenge.org.au.