



Thousands of Advocates Create Giant “Halve Poverty” Message to Tony Abbott on Manly Beach

One week out from the federal election, thousands of people from churches, community groups and schools across Tony Abbott’s Warringah electorate, along with global poverty advocates from across the nation, have gathered on Manly Beach to form the giant words **Halve Poverty (by) 2015**.

Coordinated by members of Seaforth Baptist Church as part of Micah Challenge’s national Finish the Race campaign, the Warringah residents have gathered today to put the needs of the global poor on the nation’s political agenda. Their message to Mr Abbott is to increase Australia’s contribution to foreign aid and ensure that Australia remains committed to doing all it can to achieve the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which together aim to halve global poverty by 2015.

“We want to ensure that a commitment to fighting global poverty is on the political agenda in the run up to the election,” said Vikki Howorth, Social Justice Pastor at organising church Seaforth Baptist.

“We’re thrilled that the ‘Halve Poverty’ event has provided a unique and powerful opportunity for our church to unite with other churches, community groups and schools in the Warringah electorate and together take action on behalf of the poor,” said Ms Howorth.

The event has the national support of the ‘Movement to End Poverty’, a joint action of the *Micah Challenge* and *Make Poverty History* coalitions. The Movement to End poverty petition, which contains over 80,000 signatures from Australians across the country, encourages Mr Abbott to increase Australia’s overseas aid giving to 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2020, which equates to just 70 cents in every \$100.

Marc Purcell, Executive Director of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) who presented the petition to Mike Baird, NSW Treasurer and State Liberal Member for Manly (on behalf of Mr Abbott), said: “More than 80,000 people who have joined the Movement to End Poverty stand with the many individuals, schools, churches and community groups of Warringah who are gathering today to let Tony Abbott know that they want to see Australia doing its bit to reduce global poverty.”

“We know that Australians strongly support overseas aid. Privately, we are among the most generous contributors to overseas aid in the world – with almost 2 million people donating around \$1 billion to overseas aid charities last year. More than 50,000 people generously donate from in Mr Abbott’s electorate

of Warringah alone.”

“We want our Government, and all politicians who aspire to represent us to share these priorities, and to be strong champions for a generous and effective aid program,” said Mr Purcell.

According to Micah Challenge, both major parties have been wavering in their commitment to a generous and effective aid program over the past 18 months.

Since the May 2012 budget, the ALP has removed more than \$6 billion of planned aid expenditure and the Coalition has failed to announce a timetable for reaching the bipartisan commitment to increasing aid to 0.5% of Australia’s Gross National Income.

“We’re pleased that there is still a bipartisan commitment to increasing Australia’s aid budget to 0.5% of Gross National Income in place, yet we’re using this event to call on Mr Abbott and his party to specify a date by which this target should be reached ,” said John Beckett, National Coordinator of Micah Challenge.

“By acting now, we have a chance to influence and shape the policies of a Party who could be in government as we approach the 2015 finish line for the Millennium Development Goals. And in doing so we have an opportunity to save and improve the lives of millions of the world’s poorest people.”

Dave Rowe, the Senior Pastor of organising church Seaforth Baptist, says his local church is passionate about issues like global poverty because they believe that followers of Jesus are marked by bringing hope and life into this world.

“As the church, we believe we have a mandate to speak up for those whose voices are not heard in our community and our world,” said Mr Rowe.

“This is a unique opportunity to do just that, as well as help our local community sense the heart of God for humanity. This is a message of hope for the people of Warringah as much as for the world's poor.”

While Tony Abbott was unable to attend the event, Mike Baird - Liberal State Member for Manly - delivered the response below on behalf of Mr. Abbott:

"I want to extend my best wishes to all of the Warringah residents who are participating in the Halve Poverty 2015 event on Manly Beach. My apologies that I cannot be with you. I acknowledge the churches in Waringah who are driving this event and have brought it together today. Over the past 19 years as Member for Warringah, I have always appreciated the honesty and authenticity of the members of the churches in Warringah. Often enough, you've told me that I'm wrong; occasionally, you've also told me that I've right. Long may that honesty continue!

Mr Rudd and his predecessor, Ms Gillard, made many promises about foreign aid - and never kept them. I would rather under promise and over deliver and in doing so, keep faith with you. My commitment is to build a stronger Australia with a strong prosperous economy - because it is only through building a strong economy that we can pay for the services and the aspirations we all want to achieve."

-ENDS-

High quality images are available to download at: <http://bit.ly/halvepoverty>

Available for interviews:

John Beckett, National Coordinator, Micah Challenge Australia.

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The 'Halve Poverty' event forms part of Micah Challenge's national Finish the Race campaign, whereby Christians from across Australia have been urging federal politicians to ensure Australia does its fair share towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals which aim to halve global poverty by 2015. More details at www.finish2015.com.au.

Micah Challenge is a global movement of Christians speaking out against poverty and injustice in support of the Millennium Development Goals. www.micahchallenge.org.au