

Groundhog Day as Government Breaks Foreign Aid Promise

The Government has announced yesterday it will delay its promise to increase aid levels to 0.5% of gross national income (GNI) until 2017-2018 and will divert a further \$375 million from the aid budget to fund onshore asylum seeker programs.

The Micah Challenge coalition is deeply disappointed with the Government's decision to delay its commitment to reaching this target and divert further money from the aid budget to fund domestic priorities.

The decision comes off the back of a delay in the aid budget last year and a diversion of \$375 million from the aid budget in December to fund asylum seeker programs.

"This is the second year in a row that we've been disappointed by the current Government's broken aid promises. It's starting to feel like groundhog day," said John Beckett, Micah Challenge's National Coordinator.

According to Mr Beckett, while the Government's decision to raise aid levels to 0.37% of national income in 2013/14 is a welcome increase, it is outweighed by the delay in timetable which equates to a significant cut in overseas aid spending.

"By deferring its commitment to 0.5% GNI in last year's budget and now this year's budget, we estimate the Government is cutting upwards of \$4 billion from projected funding over the next four years at the expense of the world's poorest people," said Mr Beckett.

Foreign Minister, Bob Carr, also announced yesterday that the surprise diversion of \$375 million of overseas aid to fund domestic asylum seeker programs will be repeated this year, making Australia the third largest recipient of its own aid.

"The Government's decision to divert \$750 million over two years away from life-saving programs overseas to its own refugee program is historically unprecedented in this country, and is double the average for developed countries," said Mr Beckett.

"The diverted funds could save 185,000 lives or educate 750,000 children overseas. So this decision is no light matter for our country as it will literally cost people's lives."

The news comes after calls from a variety of groups last week, including business leaders, churches, the Greens, and everyday Australians, for the Government to show strong leadership on aid as it faces the upcoming election.

"Leadership demands difficult decisions. In the lead up to the federal election, we will be calling on both the Government and the Coalition to prioritise the world's poorest by outlining a concrete timetable for reaching 0.5% of national income to overseas aid as soon as possible", said Mr Beckett.

To make your response to the Government's budget announcement go to:

<http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/budget-action>.

MEDIA RELEASE



John Beckett, Micah Challenge's National Coordinator, is available for interviews.

A blog written by John Beckett is also available to view [here](#).

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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.