

## Government Urged to Keep Its Promise to the Poor this Budget

The Micah Challenge coalition welcomes an unprecedented alliance of local and global voices, who have this week called on the Government to keep its promise to increase aid in the upcoming Federal Budget.

Australian business leaders, aid organisations, churches and the Greens party, as well as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have all highlighted the value in a growing Australian aid program.

“Last week Prime Minister Julia Gillard warned that ‘every reasonable option’ for cuts is on the table and that the Government would find responsible savings ‘even when that means spending less on things that are important and valuable’”, said John Beckett, National Coordinator of the Micah Challenge coalition.

“This means overseas aid could be in the firing line again and the world's poorest people could again be asked to sacrifice in order to help balance Australia's books”, said Mr Beckett.

In last year's budget, the Government broke its promise to increase aid to 0.5% of Australia's Gross National Income by 2015 by pushing out the timetable by one year.

In December, the Government diverted \$375 million away from poverty-reducing programs overseas in order to cover the domestic costs of processing asylum seekers.

“It's obvious that the Government is working on a difficult budget and trying to find cutbacks and savings wherever it can, yet there is a large constituency of Australians who are unwilling to see our books balanced on the backs of the poor”, said Mr Beckett.

During the week, over 35 senior Australian business leaders jointly called on the Prime Minister and Treasurer to increase the aid budget in an open letter published by The Financial Review.

The Greens party launched a bill outlining a clear timetable for meeting the international aid target of 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) by 2020 and a comprehensive peer review of Australia's aid program by the OECD urged Australia to meet its commitment to increase aid to 0.5% GNI by 2016.

“We're encouraged by the many voices who are speaking out on foreign aid and particularly heartened by the recent OECD report which has said that Australia is in a very strong economic position to deliver a growing aid budget efficiently and effectively,” said Mr Beckett.

Mr Beckett will join Foreign Minister Bob Carr and other agency representatives on a panel discussion about Australia's foreign aid program today in the South Australian electorate of Hindmarsh.

To join Micah Challenge's call on the Government to increase aid in next week's federal budget visit: <http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/budget-action>.

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

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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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](http://www.micahchallenge.org.au).*