

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Government poised to divert aid dollars away from world's poor

Micah Challenge rejects the Government's proposed plans to divert millions of dollars from its foreign aid programs to pay for asylum seeker processing.

It was revealed last night on Channel 10 news that the Government is poised to divert at least \$375 million from overseas development programs to cover the costs of supporting refugees and asylum seekers here in Australia.

"This move would represent an appalling breach of trust between the Government and the Australian public," said John Beckett, Micah Challenge's National Coordinator.

"The primary purpose of Australia's aid program is to help people overcome poverty – not as a means of achieving a short-term budget surplus. Aid saves lives, and Australia has already helped break the poverty cycle for hundreds of thousands of people across the world," said Mr Beckett.

According to Mr Beckett, while reporting some costs of Australia's refugee program is allowed under OECD guidelines, this decision would effectively make Australia the third largest recipient of its own aid program.

"It's hard to understand why such a decision would be taken, when the Prime Minister, herself, is the co-Chair of an international Working Group meant to ensure that countries meet their commitments to help halve global poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015," said Mr Beckett.

Micah Challenge, and the 20 Christian aid and development agencies within its coalition, are calling on the Government to immediately reverse this reported decision and ensure its aid commitments continue to focus on poverty reduction in the poorest communities in our world.

"As Christians we cannot simply stand back and watch while our Government tries to balance its books on the backs of the poor. Now is the time to raise our voices."

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

Individuals can take action to voice their concerns by visiting www.micahchallenge.org.au/dont-divert-aid.

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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.