MEDIA RELEASE

Exclusive Release   Date of Issue: 8/05/2018

Aid Advocacy group Micah Australia asks 'When will our government believe we have enough so we can start being generous again?'

Micah Australia today expressed concern about the lack of care for the world's poor, saying its expectation for the aid budget is it will continue to be at its lowest level ever in history.

Matt Darvas, Campaign Director of Micah Australia said "When will our government believe we have enough so we can start being generous again?"

"We expect that in 2018-2019, the Australian aid budget will receive a slight increase in line with inflation, going from $3.9 billion to just over $4 billion before being 'frozen' at this amount for the next several years."

"This 'freeze' is a politically convenient term for what is actually a cut and a move to balance our books on the backs of the world's poor."

"The effect of this 'freeze' on the aid budget is that whilst the rest of the economy 'takes off', and inflation rises, the aid budget is totally left behind and continues to diminish as a percentage of our overall Gross National Income."

Since 2013, Australia's official aid budget has fallen by 30 per cent. This is although overall government spending has grown by about 10 per cent in the same period.

"Our lack of commitment to Australian aid coupled with an absence of any long-term vision for our role in the region means that our soft power is waning, along with our reputation.

"Now, that the revenue is rolling in, and we are in an much stronger economic position, we are left wondering why we are not moving to a more generous foreign aid commitment."

Recently it was leaked that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade were asked to model additional cuts of $400 million.

At this time, Micah Australia mobilised Seniors Pastors in key electorates to reach out to over 40 members of the Coalition, asking them to rule out a cut to foreign aid in this upcoming budget. From the responses these Pastors received, Micah believes they have helped to stave off this leaked major cut, but are still holding their breath until tonight.

"If this additional cut *is* in today's budget, we'd have to be asking even more serious questions about the absolute rot in our aid budget and the lack of character and moral leadership shown by this current government."

If today's aid budget stays the same as what was outline in 2017, it will mean that by that by 2020, aid will fall to 20 cents in every $100 GNI. That's a long term decline that shows no vision and no leadership on the issue of foreign aid.

"There is no convenient time to show compassion. The people of Australia are generous and they expect more of their government, they expect their leaders to rise to the moral and humanitarian challenges of this time."

A recent Essential poll published over the weekend showed 52 per cent of people agree that Australia has "an obligation" to continue to provide aid to poorer nations.

"Having a good relationship with our neighbors in our region is just like any other good relationship. It requires commitment, care and stability. An assurance that, "We're in this together with you through the hard times and the good."

"Australian aid saves lives; I know this because I've seen it with my own eyes as a frontline aid worker. What we do as a nation matters to the lives of the world's most vulnerable people and we can do more."

What else to expect in the DFAT Budget:

- *Funding for up to two-thirds of the cost of an undersea high speed communications cable linking Australia, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, to be finished by late 2019 (estimated to cost around $200 million).*
- *Funding for APEC summit in Papua New Guinea*

Micah Australia is a coalition of churches and Christian organisations raising a powerful voice for justice and a world free from poverty.
www.micahaustralia.org