

Charlie Flanagan T.D.
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Iveagh House
80 St. Stephen's Green
Dublin 2

15 July 2014

Dear Minister Flanagan,

We would like to express our congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. We very much look forward to working with you and would like to offer you our support in your stewardship of this critically important Department.

As a small trading nation on the periphery of Europe, Ireland's self-interest and the global common good are increasingly interlinked; we depend on a global community that is rules-based, promotes peace and security, and finds effective solutions to global challenges such as climate change, migration, poverty and hunger.

Ireland's longstanding commitment to the institutions and values that enable such global responses is central to our nation's international reputation and enables Ireland to exercise considerable 'soft power' in international relations. And it is precisely that reputation and ability to influence that the Government has put at the heart of its strategy to restore Ireland's economic situation.

In this context, it is important to highlight that the Irish Aid programme, which we work in partnership with, is a major element of our global reputation. Irish Aid is widely recognised as one of the highest quality aid programmes in the world, not only supporting essential poverty reducing and life saving work, but also acting as a flagship for Ireland's international reputation.

However, the gap between Ireland's expressed ambition, and our international commitments, on the one hand and actual aid disbursements on the other hand has grown. We acknowledge that the Government – including your predecessor in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – has worked hard to protect the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget in an exceptionally difficult and uncertain economic environment.

Budget 2015 will be the tenth fiscal adjustment to the Irish economy since the current economic crisis began in 2008. Changes in ODA allocations over the past six years from €921 million (0.59% of GNI) to €637 million (0.46%) in 2013, underline the magnitude of cuts in this area. Such cuts represent the disproportionate contribution ODA reductions have made in stabilising the country's finances.

While significant fiscal challenges remain, Budget 2015 is the first budget since 2008 that is being framed within a more positive economic outlook. It is within this altering context that there is a very realistic opportunity to stem the growing gap between stated commitments and actual ODA allocations.

Budget 2015 needs to reverse the trend established since 2008 of reducing the percentage allocated to ODA and demonstrate our commitment to reach the UN target of spending 0.7% of GNI on Official Development Assistance.

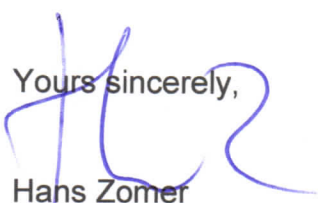
2015 also marks a key watershed year for poverty reduction and sustainable development. The third International Conference on Financing for Development and the UN Post-MDG Summit will both take place next year. There is much at stake, both for extremely vulnerable people who depend on ODA as well as the credibility of many developed countries, including Ireland, to honour their commitments.

It is our hope that when the Taoiseach addresses next year's UN Summit, he will take the opportunity to set out a clear roadmap on how Ireland will achieve the 0.7% target.

In this context, Dóchas would very much welcome an opportunity to meet with you and your officials, to discuss the future of Ireland's foreign policy in general, and the overseas aid budget in particular.

Wishing you every success in your new role, and looking forward to working with you,

Yours sincerely,



Hans Zomer
Director