

0.7%

The case for protecting Britain's International Development commitment

A BRIEFING FROM UK CHURCHES

In November 2020, the UK Chancellor announced the Government's intention to significantly reduce the budget for international development, arguing that the costs of dealing with the coronavirus pandemic meant a temporary cut was necessary.

Under the Government's plans, overseas aid spending will be reduced from 0.7 per cent to 0.5 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI). It would mean the international development budget falling by around a third, from £15.2 billion in 2019 to around £10 billion in 2021. The 0.7 per cent target had been met every year since 2013, and enshrined in law since 2015.

Senior leaders and representatives from the UK's Churches have criticised this move in strong terms.

"A promise to the poor is particularly sacred. These words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu are impossible to ignore as the UK government plans to break our promises to the world's poorest people.

Reducing our overseas aid commitment at this critical time is morally wrong, politically foolish and an act of national self-harm. Its impact will be felt not only in refugee camps and conflict zones but also much closer to home."

Most Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

"A clear measure of a nation's greatness is the manner in which it responds to the needs of its poorest. The same is true for the response to poverty between nations. If we truly wish to be a great nation, then cutting the overseas aid budget is a retrograde step."

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster

"Cuts have consequences. Cutting the UK aid budget will have consequences for the world's poorest. This is not just about the compassion of our country, it is about justice.

It will result in people not accessing vital health care during a global pandemic. People going hungry. In fewer children being educated and their already limited choices being further diminished."

Christian Aid

"In times of global need, it is those with the broadest shoulders that need to support others. International development is not about charity, it is essential to the delivery of the vision of a Global Britain."

Very Revd Dr Susan Brown, Church of Scotland

"The UK government's commitment to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income on international development has given the UK much to be proud of as a player on the international stage, showing our solidarity with other nations, recognising our inter-connectedness as a global community, and providing us with a strong platform from which to encourage global responsibility in others. It is not acceptable to say that because people in the UK are suffering the economic effects of the pandemic, more suffering should be visited upon others."

Most Revd John Davies, Archbishop of Wales

“We believe that a commitment to the poorest in the world should not be an optional extra but at the heart of our country’s responsibilities, especially in the context of a global pandemic and a climate emergency.”

Revd Clare Downing & Mr Peter Pay, Moderators of General Assembly, United Reformed Church

“Times are tough for many of us, both here in the UK, and for our brothers and sisters across the globe. The UK aid commitment is a percentage of the UK’s income – and so it changes each year, and is never beyond what we as a nation can afford.”

Revd Richard Teal & Mrs Carolyn Lawrence, President & Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

“I listened with great sadness to the government plan to break our promise to the world by cutting our overseas aid budget. I was then angered when the Chancellor told us that it was because we, the people wouldn't be happy with us handing the legally agreed budget to those in need.”

Most Revd Mark Strange, Primus of Scottish Episcopal Church

“The UK risks its standing as a nation committed to seeing a healthier, safer and flourishing world –on the eve of hosting the G7 summit and the 26th UN Climate Change Conference.”

Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary, Baptist Union of Great Britain

The Churches and global poverty reduction

With a calling to love our neighbours, a commitment to working for justice, and many global connections, for many decades Churches have championed international efforts around human development and global poverty reduction. The 0.7 per cent target has its origins in an initiative of the World Council of Churches in 1958, before being adopted by the United Nations in 1970.

In the UK, Churches and Christians have played a significant role in calling for Britain to support international development and fulfil its global responsibilities in relation to aid, trade, debt and climate, through campaigns such as Jubilee 2000 and Make Poverty History. Many of the major British international development agencies such as Christian Aid, CAFOD, Tearfund and World Vision have their roots in the churches.

Call on your MP to oppose the aid cut

The decision to reduce the UK’s international development commitment requires a change in the law. Please contact your Member of Parliament to make the case for opposing the cut and protecting Britain’s international development commitment.

Below are some points you might wish to make:

- **UK aid works.** UK aid plays a vital role in improving the lives of people in some of the world’s poorest countries. Britain has a global reputation for the impact and effectiveness of its aid programmes.
- **Cutting the aid budget will cost lives.** Save the Children estimates that a 30 per cent cut applied across previous aid spending could mean:
 - 5.6 million fewer children a year will be immunised, and 105,000 lives a year will not be saved
 - 940,000 fewer children a year will be supported to gain a decent education
 - 2.0 million fewer people a year will be reached with humanitarian assistance
 - 3.8 million fewer people a year will be supported to gain access to clean water and/or better sanitation.

The global pandemic is the biggest humanitarian crisis in a generation, and has pushed an estimated 150 million people worldwide into extreme poverty. At this crucial time, more international assistance is needed, not less.

- **It is the right thing to keep our promises.** The 0.7 per cent commitment has been the subject of cross-party consensus for 15 years, even through the financial crash of 2008-9. In 2015 all the major parties supported enshrining the target in legislation in perpetuity. The Conservative party restated its commitment to maintaining the aid budget in its 2019 election manifesto, and again when the Department for International Development was merged into the Foreign Office in the summer of 2020. Cutting aid would be a breach of promises made to the electorate and to the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.
- **Britain should be proud of its global leadership in supporting development.** The UK's commitment to 0.7 per cent has been a catalyst for a step-change in global efforts to support development. At least five members of the G7 are planning to increase aid in 2021. France and Germany will each spend more than 0.5 percent of their economies on aid in 2021. The UK has been influential in pushing its peers to commit to more and better aid – but will now drop behind them. In a year when the UK will host the G7 and UN Climate Summits, and the government is seeking to establish a role and vision for a post-Brexit 'Global Britain', we should be showing leadership through our continued commitment to international development.
- **Supporting international development makes sense for Britain.** In an age of global interdependence, helping to build safer, fairer, healthier societies where all can thrive is in everyone's interests. In relation to Covid-19, only when people and countries around the world are free of the virus will lifting the restrictions on our lives be possible. Other contemporary challenges which affect Britain, such as climate change, migration and conflict, will only be effectively addressed through international action.
- **The 0.7 per cent commitment is affordable.** The reason that the commitment is expressed as a percentage of national income is meant to be that it flexes depending on economic circumstances, so it should never be 'unaffordable'. Aid programmes were already going to be reduced because of the contraction of the UK economy. The international development budget is a relatively small proportion of government expenditure – in 2019, it was about a tenth of the amount spent by the government on health in England, and just over a third of the amount devoted to defence. Although public borrowing is at high levels, because of historically low interest rates, the cost of servicing that debt is at the lowest level since the Second World War, and falling. At the same time as the government announced its intention to cut the aid budget, it set out a plan to increase military spending by £16.5bn over four years.
- **We can ensure all aid is spent on tackling global poverty.** It is vital when talking about the amount of aid spent that we also focus on the quality of that aid too. Unfortunately, there have been examples of 'bad aid' – involving abuse, fraud and mismanagement. These make media headlines which can contribute to declining public trust in UK aid. But this should not mean that we cut the aid budget. On the contrary, it means we should improve the way we spend aid. The 2002 International Development Act already enshrines in law that all aid spending must be spent on tackling poverty, and this should remain the focus for aid spending.

Find your MP's contact details at members.parliament.uk or by calling 020 7219 3000.

This briefing has been prepared by the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Methodist Church, United Reformed Church and Church of Scotland (www.jointpublicissues.org.uk), on behalf of a wider group of Churches in Britain. It is published by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

February 2021



Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
Interchurch House
35 Lower Marsh
London SE1 7RL

+44 (0) 20 3794 2288
info@ctbi.org.uk
www.ctbi.org.uk

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