

**Minister of State for Overseas Development,
Mr. Michael Kitt T.D.**

**Irish Aid Third Level Conference, National University of Ireland, Galway,
Saturday 24 November 2007**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured and delighted to be here this evening in my home county of Galway on the occasion of the opening of the Development's Futures Conference. I would like to thank Iognáid Ó Muircheartaigh, President of NUI Galway for his support towards this conference and the Registrar, Professor James Browne for being such a gracious host.

I congratulate Dr. Su-ming Khoo and Carol Healy and their fellow committee members for their hard work and commitment in organising this event. Please allow me to extend a warm Galway welcome to all participants and speakers here today, especially those who have travelled from overseas to be with us. Irish Aid is delighted to be in a position to provide support for this conference, and to facilitate the participation of some of our overseas visitors.

I welcome the distinguished Mr. Michael Edwards of the Ford Foundation and I look forward to hearing his keynote address this evening on the current schools of development thinking. I also look forward to viewing the Palagummi Sainath photographic exhibition which vividly presents the realities of women's lives in India.

This evening I am going to talk about the valuable role which development education plays in Ireland and why we place such an emphasis on it in the Government's Aid programme.

I am also going to talk about our work with Higher Education institutions here in Ireland, in pursuit of our development goals. Finally I would like to touch on a couple of initiatives from the White Paper on Irish Aid, just over one year on from its launch.

The Education Sector and Development Education

In 2005 we spent €545 million in total on our aid programme. This year the figure will reach €815m. By 2012 we are likely to commit up to €1.5 billion a year as we meet our Millennium Development target of 0.7% of GNP.

As we move towards this target, and our aid programme increases in size, I believe that it is very important that Irish citizens have an opportunity to deepen their understanding of development issues and why Ireland is dedicating increased resources to tackling global poverty.

Development education will play a key role in this. It is a central part of the Irish Aid programme and we are pleased to support and partner the work of universities, schools, NGOs and civil society groups throughout the country in this area. I recently launched Irish Aid's new five year Development Education Strategy '*Promoting Public Engagement for Development*' 2007-2011.

The strategy reiterates our commitment to development education and clearly outlines Irish Aid priorities over the next five years. The aim is that development education reaches a wide audience in Ireland by increasing the provision of high-quality programmes to teachers and others involved in development education and by working with the education sector, NGOs and civil society partners.

We will continue to support the work of higher education institutions and development education organisations working to bring development issues into the classrooms and lecture halls of Ireland. Our work directly with schools and colleges to enable them to deliver development education to their students will also continue. Through this work, we hope to make global and development issues part and parcel of an Irish education. This work is important, not just in the context of the next few years, as we expand our programme, but in the long term.

The level of interest in development issues as demonstrated by the support for the Irish Aid Schools Linking and Immersion Scheme among second level teachers and students is very heartening. Many of these students will undoubtedly progress to third level education in years to come. The interest and curiosity they have now about global development should be nurtured throughout their education. We want to continue to work with the universities and colleges of Ireland to ensure that can happen.

Equipping our educators with the skills, resources and confidence to deliver curricula and programmes through the lens of development education is critically important. We also need to build on the north-south dynamic on the island of Ireland and the contribution this can make to development education and the work in tackling global development challenges more broadly.

There is clearly a need for a wide range of creative approaches to development education. The establishment of the Development Education and Research Network (DERN) here in NUIG which seeks to engage not only NUIG's staff and students but also the wider community here in Galway on development issues is a fine example of this.

I would now like to turn to our **engagement with the Higher Education sector** in Ireland in a little more detail.

A key principle of Irish Aid is that developing countries need to be supported in finding local solutions to their unique development problems and issues.

Higher education institutions clearly have a pivotal role to play in research on issues that can accelerate social and economic progress as we know from our own experience here in Ireland. Recognising that potential, Irish Aid launched last year a programme of capacity building and research that will benefit higher education institutions in our partner countries.

We are very pleased with the outcome of the first round of the Programme's funding earlier this year. Five full application grants were awarded to higher education institutes in Ireland with a view to building links with southern counterparts. The interest in the second round of funding next year is very high.

The Irish Aid Programme of Strategic Cooperation with Higher Education and Research Institutes, has already resulted in a stronger engagement with the third level sector in pursuit of our goal of poverty reduction in the developing countries in which we work.

In light of this and the high quality of applications to date I am pleased to announce this evening an increased allocation to the programme's budget of **€6 million** over the next four years to 2011. This will bring the total budget for the programme to €20.4 million. It will allow us to maximise the benefits of the research and knowledge from the programme in fighting poverty and exclusion in some of the world's poorest countries. It also underlines our ongoing commitment to this work in partnership with the third level sector.

The programme of cooperation was of course a key initiative of the **White Paper** published last year. I would like to take this opportunity to mention a few other initiatives on which we have been working.

As I said earlier, public engagement with development issues is crucial now more than ever. The opening of an Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre on O'Connell Street in Dublin early next year will play a key role in this and in promoting awareness of development-related volunteering options.

The Irish Aid Centre will be available to NGOs, civil society and faith-based organisations as a venue for public events to raise awareness of international development issues. I would encourage you to use the centre and to promote visits by schools and community groups. It is also important that Ireland contribute to international efforts to tackle key development issues. The Hunger Task Force, another White Paper initiative, will report to me next summer and I look forward to examining proposals that will contribute to the fight against world hunger.

Closing Remarks

The theme of this conference, '*Development's Futures*', reflects the key development challenges we face - building a world in which every person has a future free of poverty and full of opportunity. Partnership with the developing world based on a spirit of equality is a key principle of the Irish Aid programme.

In this spirit, I want to take this opportunity this evening to acknowledge the commitment and expertise of education providers and NGOs in the field of development and development education. I can assure you that Irish Aid will seek to continually build on our existing partnerships to ensure the attainment of our common ultimate goal, which is the elimination of global poverty and exclusion.

This conference series offers a welcome space for all participants – academics, practitioners and activists - to reflect and learn from each others experience. I am delighted to announce here today that the next in this series of Third Level conferences will be hosted by the University of Limerick in early 2009 with the support of Irish Aid.

I would like to wish you every success with the conference programme and with your work over the coming year.

Thank you.