



Irish Congress of Trade Unions submission
to Public Consultations on the Government of Ireland's
new International Development Policy

30 August 2018

Nature of views (indicate personal / on behalf of an organisation): **Organisational**

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Introduction:

Trade unions are development actors in our own right. Through our everyday work in upholding freedom of association and collective bargaining rights, engaging in social dialogue and promoting decent work, we are essential to achieving sustainable development.

"Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men"

Congress is a member of the Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN) whose objective is to bring the trade union perspective into international development policy debates and improve the coordination and effectiveness of trade union development cooperation activities.

To do this, the network aims to:

- bring trade unions voice into development policymaking processes, promoting the Decent Work Agenda (social protection, social dialogue, labour rights);
- improve the coordination and effectiveness of trade union development cooperation initiatives;

- build the capacity of trade union organisations.

Trade Union priorities integrated into development policies include:

- Decent work and social protection are included in the new UN Agenda 2030 (SDGs) framework and the Financing for Development (FfD) Agenda.
- The European Union included social dialogue and social protection as well as the Decent Work Agenda in its main policy documents on development policies.
- Trade unions, through TUAC, play an active role in the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD.
- Decent Work and inequality were respectively set as development policy priority and development challenge for the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC).
- Even the World Bank has recently acknowledged that the development of industrial relations and collective bargaining in different countries, can be essential in their efforts to balance competitiveness, with equitable wages, and improved working conditions. They add that “well-functioning labour markets are essential for solid economic performance, as well as future economic growth, and, for the well-being of workers, and their families”. They have also stated that “unions and collective bargaining have an equalizing effect on earnings

distributions by compressing wage differentials. Research has shown that wage inequality falls during periods when union density is increasing and rises when union membership is in decline.”

Trade unions play a crucial role in building coherence and accountability into 2030 Agenda implementation efforts. We seek to reinforce the accountability of the implementation process as well as to build bridges and strengthen collaboration with other stakeholders. We provide independent monitoring of key SDGs, highlighting worker’s priorities within different contexts.

The 2019 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) is set to be a crucial year for trade unions as the [SDGs](#) under review will include a number of our priority goals, including SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 10 (Inequalities) and SDG 13 (climate action).

The 107th International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2018 had a major focus on effective development cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. The workers’ group welcomed the adopted report (available [here](#)). Particular highlights include:

- the normative mandate of the ILO, as well as international agreements related to the development effectiveness agenda are recognised as key principles governing ILO development cooperation in the preamble;

- the recognition of transparency and accountability as fundamental criteria to be respected in particular when talking about innovative finance instruments and the role of private sector in development;
- the reaffirming of the ILO role in promoting decent work in the supply chains with multinationals;
- the underlining of the need to uphold a balanced approach amongst the four strategic pillars of the decent work agenda and the importance of supporting the organisational capacity of constituents;
- the provision of a solid and clear-cut positioning of constituents on the UN reform, preserving the unique character of the ILO role, in political, institutional and operational levels.

Irish Aid played a very constructive role in the discussions.

Congress has a proud history of financial and practical support for trade unions in developing countries, including: Tanzania, Burma (also supported by Irish Aid Civil Society Fund), in Tsunami affected regions, Uganda, Colombia and Belize and has been to the forefront in campaigning for the human rights of the Palestinian people. Congress believes that a strong, vibrant and independent civil society – including a strong independent trade union movement - is essential for development, and that civil society organisations in particular have an important role to play in 'bringing the voices of the

poor' to influence government policies, to challenge injustice and to hold governments to account. Shrinking democratic space for working people and unchecked corporate greed are on the rise according to the 2018 annual ITUC Global Rights Index. The number of countries with arbitrary arrests and detention of workers increased from 44 in 2017 to 59 in 2018, and freedom of speech was constrained in 54 countries. More countries are excluding workers from labour law – from migrant workers, public sector employees to workers in platform businesses, with 65% of countries excluding whole categories of workers from labour law.

The report's key findings include:

- 65% of countries exclude some groups of workers from labour law.
- 87% of countries have violated the right to strike.
- 81% of countries deny some or all workers collective bargaining.
- Out of 142 countries surveyed, 54 deny or constrain free speech and freedom of assembly.
- The number of countries in which workers are exposed to physical violence and threats increased by 10% (from 59 to 65) and include Bahrain, Honduras, Italy and Pakistan.
- Countries where workers are arrested and detained increased from 44 in 2017 to 59 in 2018.

- Trade unionists were murdered in nine countries - Brazil, China, Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea, Mexico, Niger, Nigeria and Tanzania.

The three global trends for workers' rights identified in the 2018 Global Rights Index are shrinking democratic space, unchecked corporate influence and the importance of legislation.

In setting the context above, our views on the questions posed in the consultation are as follows:

What elements of Ireland's international development experience should the new policy reflect?

Irish Aid and its staff worldwide is quite rightly recognised as a world leader in delivering a high quality aid programme which delivers clear results for the world's poorest people. Ireland has taken a leadership role in the negotiation of Agenda 2030; in the fight against global hunger; in responding to humanitarian emergencies and developing strong systems of accountability.

Congress notes the engagement of Irish Aid in the whole decent work agenda and encourages continued and enhanced work in this area. This includes the partnership agreement with the ILO over the next four years, due to run from December 2017 to December 2021. The goal of the partnership – "that national governments use appropriate, well designed and well managed social protection measures and employment

promoting approaches to the delivery of public investments in order to promote resilience, access to services and employment opportunities for poor and vulnerable people, contributing to economic inclusion” – is in line with our own priorities. We welcome the focus on building social protection floors in four countries (Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Vietnam); and the work with the ILO on Employment Intensive Investment Programmes in Tanzania and Mozambique.

Congress has been a long-time supporter of Irish Aid through our involvement in national campaigns to ensure that we keep our promises to the world’s poorest people by retaining commitments to reach the 0.7% of GNP for overseas development assistance.

“Congress believes that Budget 2019 should mark a substantial increase in Ireland’s official Overseas Development Aid (ODA) allocation. Ireland’s official ODA in 2018 amounts to €700 million, or approximately 0.3% of GNI. The Government’s stated intention is to reach the UN target of allocating 0.7% of GNI to official ODA by 2030, the timeframe for the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This is also the proposed timeframe of the Review of the Irish Aid Programme agreed by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence in February 2018. Congress strongly believes that Ireland should allocate 0.7% of GNI to official ODA by 2025; countries that have already achieved this target include Norway

(1.1%), Luxembourg (1%), Sweden (0.9%), Denmark (0.8%), as well as Germany and the United Kingdom”.

Congress Pre-Budget Submission (August 2018) "Investing in our Shared Future"

More funding, and providing it through a planned and realistic roadmap, will be essential if Irish Aid is to continue to deliver a quality aid programme. For Ireland to have credibility, the new international development policy will require substantial resourcing in terms of staff capacity and funding. We urge the Government to not only publish a roadmap to meet Ireland's commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI on official development assistance (ODA), but to start delivering on this financial promise in Budget 2019. Adhering to percentage increases on ODA is vital if Ireland is to meet internationally accepted targets, and maintain its reputation.

What are the implications of the changing global context for Ireland's international development cooperation and humanitarian action?

The current political and socio-economic trends at global level pose enormous challenges to the trade union movement overall. Inequalities in global wealth are staggering with income inequality at record levels where 1% of the population holds equivalent wealth to that of the remaining 99%. Many working families face difficulties to pay for decent housing,

appropriate health care, old-age security and decent education for their children. This is also pushing the growth of the informal economy. The weakening of labour market institutions is one key cause of increasing inequality. The neo-liberal “structural reform paradigm” employed since the 1980s by global institutions, and revamped nowadays, has the effect of increasing privatisation processes and progressively reducing the role of the state in providing accessible common goods and services. The ongoing integration of national economies into global markets and the expansion of global supply chains have intensified competition and caused global corporations to cut labour costs through restructuring, outsourcing and off-shoring.

The growing role of the private sector in development is another trend that needs further attention and discussion. We support the Dóchas call on Irish Aid to support new initiatives that leverage private sector partnerships, but only where sustainable approaches are secured. Their paper also emphasises the importance of monitoring due diligence and human rights obligations and it is a source of much frustration that we have seen very limited progress to deliver and monitor Ireland’s National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. Trade unions have consistently acknowledged a role for the private sector in development, but also that private sector involvement is not a panacea for positive development results. The sustainability of a company and sustainable development are not equivalent. Important steps are needed: governments must ensure business transparency and accountability in

investments, and create the necessary regulatory frameworks for companies to fulfil their 'due diligence' responsibilities, as prescribed by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Mechanisms for compensation must be put in place. Furthermore, governments need to close the gaps in the international tax system to ensure that corporations pay their fair share and avoid tax evasion.

Business interests are also prevailing in the global trade agendas, with investor rights trumping human rights and multilateralism being abandoned to bilateral relations in search of business interests.

Indeed, international governance is far from being inclusive, still over-controlled by powerful economies and characterised by weak accountability systems. The fragility of the global governance is particularly manifested when it comes to migration (economic migration, refugees, environmental migration), a growing phenomenon at global scale. The absence of political will to tackle the causes of migration is blatant, linked to the incapability of the current neo-liberal economic model in distributing resources on an equal basis. These challenges will continue to be tackled by the trade union movement. Human and labour rights, collective bargaining, social dialogue, social protection, gender equality are not only essential ingredients for sustainable economic growth but they are the pillars for democracy building, which is the cornerstone for just development processes.

Promoting the decent work agenda (DWA) remains the main objective of our trade union input into the development policy debate. The DWA, based on rights and democratic ownership, is the foundation for sustainable development as opposed to palliative interventions. It also fosters policy coherence for development involving the key actors in economic and labour areas, to negotiate, pilot and mitigate risks on questions of economic, labour market, just transition and social policies but also on good governance, fiscal policies and development, and other relevant areas.

In a wide ranging speech to this year's international labour conference President Michael D Higgins outlined why the ILO and Tripartism was so important in today's fractured world.

"Ever since its inception, the International Labour Organisation has been dedicated to the proposition that peace can only be built, and can only be sustained, when it is founded on a just and equal economic order, one capable of meeting the needs and aspirations of all people". He added: that tripartism, social dialogue and the work of the ILO "will be necessary if we are to accomplish the goals of that most remarkable declaration of shared global solidarity, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

As the Irish Government is a titular member of the ILO Governing Body, Irish Aid can play a proactive role in redressing imbalances by ensuring the ILO's role in the international system and continuing to help build the capacity

of the organisation and its constituents to contribute to the realisation of Decent Work for All.

On the positive side, the 2030 Agenda is premised on the recognition of a mutual dependence of environmental, economic and social sustainability. Together with the Paris Climate Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, it provides the framework for achieving sustainable and resilient societies by means of a rights-based approach, which is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. However, three years down the line, we are not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 - challenges remain to eradicate poverty, address climate change, ensure decent work as well as quality education, reduce inequalities and build peaceful, inclusive societies for all. Governments have committed to ensuring the realisation of the 2030 Agenda; yet, the 2018 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) reveals insufficient ambition as well as public financing, and lacks action-oriented commitment to overcome the obstacles to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

A zero-carbon, zero-poverty world is within our reach, but requires collective and inclusive efforts. Yet, the legitimate role of trade unions and workers to defend their rights, protect their interests and contribute to fairer societies is under attack worldwide. Trade unionists are targeted by intimidation, violence and even murder. This needs to be addressed throughout the 2030 Agenda process. Furthermore,

governments should support the regulatory and policy frameworks required to enable the private sector to contribute to the fulfilment of human rights and nationally defined 2030 Agenda objectives, in line with the public interest.

On the solutions side, workers and trade unions highlight the key role of social dialogue as a driver and governance instrument for sustainable development. Social dialogue creates local ownership of the transition our societies need, builds societal consensus and inclusion, eases policy implementation, cements in agreed upon measures and strengthens democratic processes. It has been at the core of development success-stories, both historically and in the present-day. Its role should be recognised and valued within 2030 Agenda implementation.

The new Irish Aid White Paper will need to articulate clearly how it intends to play a role in addressing these shortcomings.

Do the proposed priorities respond to the changing context and contribute to the achievement of our vision of a more equal, peaceful, sustainable world?

The extent of the complex challenges outlined above points to the need for a multifaceted response. Irish Aid has indicated areas of focus that build on its previous strengths.

Among the priorities for transformation listed are inclusive economic growth, providing decent work and implementing

national social protection systems in developing countries. These align with our own priorities for development and as such are welcome.

However, given the content of the ITUC 2018 Global Rights Index report, we would also encourage a greater emphasis on civil society space and associate ourselves with the submission on this by a number of civil society organisations which calls for a multifaceted response with financial, policy, diplomatic and practical support needed. We endorse the call to place particular importance on more support to civil society networks and collaborative efforts, as well as flexible funding, in order to maintain a diverse and professional civil society in Ireland and partner countries, and to strengthen civil society's voice to affect and shape policy.

There is also a welcome focus on the issue of Climate change and the support to strengthen the least developed countries negotiating group, focus on gender and other climate justice issues. Congress would like to see more partnership work on the issue of a Just Transition. For example, the Just Transition Centre was established in 2016 by the ITUC and partners. The Centre brings together workers and their unions, communities, businesses and governments in social dialogue to ensure that labour has a seat at the table when planning for a Just Transition to a low-carbon world. A Just Transition secures the future and livelihoods of workers and their communities in the transition to a low-carbon economy. It is based on social

dialogue between workers and their unions, employers, government and communities. A plan for Just Transition provides and guarantees better and decent jobs, social protection, more training opportunities and greater job security for all workers affected by global warming and climate change policies.

The Just Transition Centre works with stakeholders to accelerate the Just Transition process through:

- **Empowering workers and their allies** through sharing examples of Just Transition processes and plans, facilitating peer-to-peer skill and experience sharing, and capacity building on Just Transition.
- **Documenting** best practice in social dialogue processes through interviews, videos, reports and case studies.
- **Starting and supporting social dialogue processes** involving unions, communities, government and business, with participation from investors and experts.
- **Strategic input** to national and global policy dialogues and planning on Just Transition.

How can we improve delivery of Ireland's international development cooperation and humanitarian action?

As previously outlined, more funding will be essential if Irish Aid is to continue to deliver a quality aid programme. The current spend of 0.3% of GNI on ODA is significant but still a long way from internationally agreed targets. However, money alone will not ensure the quality of our aid programme into the future and any increases must be aligned with an increase in staff and their development in order to maintain our international reputation.

The private sector clearly is an important engine of economic growth and wealth creation. But to be effective and benefit the people, it needs to be framed within a normative approach to development – one that guarantees rights – and a vision of governments that maintain its developmental leadership role. One major concern trade unions have with this gravitation towards the private sector is that it undercuts the developmental role of the state and its institutions for delivering public services. A developmental role of government would help ensure country ownership, a core pillar of aid effectiveness, and re-direct private sector role toward the much needed mobilisation of domestic resource. Rights based approach to development cooperation and the role of private sector should ensure compliance with ILO standards, uphold the role of social partners since there is no automatic cause-effect relationship between private sector development and

decent work creation. Holding multinational businesses to account for their impact would require alignment of corporate behaviour and reporting with aid effectiveness principles and measuring impacts. Any private sector for development initiative should first aim at supporting local SMEs among others to help tackle informality. As we have already stressed, the very motivation that underpins private sector activity, namely its profit seeking nature, is not necessarily aligned with development objectives. Trade unions will not accept that the private sector becomes a suitable replacement to the state in delivering essential services, and as a result public finance should continue to be used to strengthen state institutions.

In terms of private sector involvement, we have two broad policy priorities:

- Setting clear boundaries for public financing of development initiatives for the private sector;
- ensuring social protection and public service development objectives and recipient country ownership;

While Irish Aid has made a contribution in terms of delivering the decent work agenda, we would like to see an enhanced role and a greater priority given to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 8 – the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Irish Aid should also enhance its work with the ILO constituents to ensure that the conclusions of the discussion on effective

development cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals guide the work of the ILO in the coming years, specifically on the ILO involvement in the UN reform process, the development of a new development cooperation strategy beyond 2018, and play a leadership role in the ILO centenary discussions at the ILC next year.

Of particular concern is the situation in Palestine where The unemployment rate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) has risen to the world's highest level, at 27.4 per cent in 2017, according to the latest annual report of the ILO - [The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories](#).

Women and youth are particularly affected. Unemployment rates among Palestinian women are now approaching the 50 per cent mark, with rates for youth not far behind. In Gaza, almost every second worker is unemployed and almost two thirds of women workers are jobless. The blockade has paralyzed much of the economic activity, and per capita incomes have fallen behind the levels of the early 1990s.

Developments in the labour market mirror the dismal economic situation and the constraints imposed by the occupation. The report also details the multiple restrictions on economic activity arising from the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Most of the occupied land remains effectively off limits for Palestinians, settlement building is intensifying and East Jerusalem is cut off from the rest of the West Bank.

Some 131,000 Palestinians worked in Israel and the settlements in 2017, contributing to the livelihoods of some 650,000 people in the West Bank. The report notes with concern, however, that their work remains associated with high costs, vulnerabilities and hardship and calls for dialogue and a joint search for solutions which “will effectively bring about decent work to the occupied Arab territories”. Clearly, as acknowledged by Irish Aid, the occupation continues to impede Palestinian development and Irish Aid should play an enhanced role in providing fact based information into discussions on an overall Irish response to the plight of the Palestinian people.