

Minister of State with special responsibility for Overseas Development  
Peter Power T.D.  
Irish Aid  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
Riverstone House  
23 - 27 Henry Street  
Limerick



10 June 2010

Dear Minister Power,

**RE: Habitat for Humanity's response to the Millennium Development Goals**

I am writing to you following the invitation you made in the Oireachtas for organisations across the political and non-governmental spectrum to document their response to the Millennium Development Goals.

Habitat for Humanity (HFH) is an international non-profit organisation that aims to eliminate poverty housing by building simple, decent, affordable homes and by making decent housing a matter of conscience and action. Throughout our work in Ireland and around the world we contribute significantly to the achievement of the MDGs on a daily basis.

As a self-build programme, HFH does not build houses for people; it builds with them. We work together with homeowners and volunteers to construct, renovate or refurbish homes, using donations of money, land and materials. Once completed, houses are sold to partner families at no profit, providing a hand up, rather than a hand out. HFH now works in nearly 100 countries and has built more than 350,000 houses around the world, providing more than 1,750,000 people in more than 3,000 communities with simple, decent, affordable homes. A HFH home is completed somewhere in the world every 21 minutes.

HFH Ireland supports the international efforts of Habitat for Humanity by sending teams of Irish volunteers overseas to help build homes through its Global Village programme. We were established in 2004 and since then have sent 1,250 volunteers to over 20 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, raising \$2.88million USD to physically and financially support the building of over 750 homes. Teams of volunteers come from schools, the corporate sector, universities and community groups as well as groups of individuals. Volunteers travel for up to 2 weeks to the host country, helping with the construction of the local houses, getting to know the local communities and cultures and raising funds for the host programme.

Since our establishment in Ireland in 2002, HFH has partnered with Irish Aid, and its predecessor Development Co-Operation Ireland, on numerous projects around the world. In 2005 HFH was awarded funds to build shelters with communities in Sri Lanka who were displaced by the December 2004 tsunami and Civil War.

Currently, HFH Ireland receives funding from the Civil Society Fund Ireland, through Irish Aid, for an Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) project in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia. The project aims to mobilise and build the capacity of the local community to construct and rehabilitate shelter and latrines for 280 OVC and their families. 300 OVC caregivers are being educated about HIV/AIDS issues, how to care for and support their families and on inheritance rights so they can create wills to protect the interests of surviving spouses and children. Legal title to individual plots of land is also being secured to ensure stability and security of OVC beneficiary families.

In Ireland, last year Irish Aid funded our Development Education programme for Transition Year students. This programme allowed students to become aware of the complexity and interconnectedness of poverty issues on a local and a global level, explore the MDGs and Ireland's role in their delivery, and embrace cultural interaction and challenge stereotypes.

As you can gauge from the above projects, HFH works with communities to alleviate poverty through housing thereby actively engaging in the MDG agenda. MDG 7, Target 11 which identifies the need to secure 'by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers', explicitly relates to our work. 50 per cent of the world's population now live in cities, and between 43-78 per cent of the urban population in the Global South live in slums.

Living in poverty housing impacts upon every aspect of an individual's and community's life and, therefore, filters into all of the MDGs. When the cost of housing is high, a parent often has to choose between shelter and food for their family (MDG1). Children have no space to study, or are forced to earn money instead of going to school (MDG2). In many countries, women have no land or property rights and are evicted from their home if their husband dies (MDG3). Inadequate access to basic health care, overcrowding, poor ventilation and exposure to hazardous conditions leads to high infant mortality and maternal death rates (MDG 4 and 5). There are extremely high HIV prevalence rates in slum areas and poverty pushes people into high risk lifestyles to provide for their families (MDG 6). There is a lack of access to clean water and sanitation facilities and as slums are pushed to the fringes of cities they are destroying environmentally sensitive areas (MDG7).

A decent housing environment contributes significantly to other social outcomes, leading to a reduction in poverty, improvement in well-being of women and children, and the provision of safe, decent community environments.

**What housing can deliver is as important as what housing is.**

The methodologies of participation and partnership that Habitat for Humanity has pioneered to tackle poverty housing, empower householders to tackle the sources of insecurity, promote livelihood capabilities and support more effective functioning of processes and institutions (MDG8).

HFH forges strategic partnerships with Community Based Organisation's, local municipalities, government agencies and other NGOs to make practical interventions which make projects possible and sustainable. Our participatory model empowers individuals and communities to address the interdependencies between inadequate shelter and other sources of human security.

HFH is at the centre of the global MDG agenda, addressing the root causes of poverty through community empowerment and the transformation of structures of governance. We are a signatory to the Code of Good Practice developed by Comhlámh and the Act Now on 2015 campaign lead by Dóchas. We are also members of IDEA and Dóchas. We are aware of Ireland's long history of solidarity with poor and vulnerable countries around the world and we are grateful for the support of Irish Aid on our projects.

We recognise the valuable work you have done as Minister of State with special responsibility for Overseas Development and we urge you to continue in this work in promoting the MDG agenda and ensuring Ireland meets the UN target of spending 0.7% of our national income on overseas aid by 2015.

Yours sincerely,



Karen Kennedy  
Executive Director  
Habitat for Humanity Ireland