



Communications Unit
Level 8 222 Pitt Street SYDNEY
PO Box A2266 Sydney South NSW 1235

Embargoed until 6am, Wednesday 22 September 2004

PLAYING AT THE EDGES WILL NOT END GLOBAL POVERTY

The Uniting Church believes that it is time for the issue of global poverty to make a splash in this election campaign. “We do our country’s future no good while we continue to play around the edges of ending global poverty,” Uniting Church President, Rev. Dr Dean Drayton said today.

“As a thriving nation, Australia must be a responsible global citizen that looks out for those countries most in need.”

Rev. Drayton said Australia had a good record when it came to overseas aid and development but was in danger of jeopardising it with its response to debt relief and low levels of aid and development funding. He urged politicians to commit to do more, especially in our own region.

“In a world where 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 a day, 113 million children do not attend school and 11 million die prematurely each year, Australia needs to recognise that security cannot be found by blindly pursuing our own economic agenda and closing ourselves off from the world’s pain.

“We have a responsibility to use some of our wealth and prosperity to help those countries ravaged by war, natural disaster, endemic poverty and unsustainable levels of foreign debt. It’s appalling that so many impoverished countries are forced to spend more on servicing their foreign debt than they do on services and basic necessities for their own people.

“The Government needs to recognise that there is little point in giving aid and development funds when debt repayments swallow up any revenue and long-term economic benefit generated by that funding.

“We call on all political parties to commit Australia to cancelling the unpayable component of debt in countries like the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Iraq, Vietnam, Nepal and Bangladesh. These debts cannot be paid without long-term harm to the well being of those nations,” Rev. Drayton said.

Uniting International Mission National Director, Rev. Bill Fischer, said the Church’s decades of experience delivering government aid and privately funded development projects in the Asia-Pacific region has shown the importance of meeting our promises to fight international poverty.

“In September 2000, Australia was one of 191 United Nations members that signed the Millennium Development Goals which outlined specific and achievable ways to eradicate poverty and make development a reality for those in the poorest nations on earth.

“Part of our commitment was a ten-year pledge to commit 0.7 per cent of our Gross Domestic Product to aid and development. The Australian Government has failed to live up to its promise. In 2001 and 2002 only 0.25 per cent was spent and there is no sign of any improvement in the future.

“In the face of the huge need we must rise above our economic self-interest. There can be no security for Australia while so many millions of people continue to live in poverty throughout the world,” Rev. Fischer said.

**Media contacts: Reverend Bill Fischer, 0408 448 801
Gavin Melvin, Senior Communication Officer, 0417 416 674**