

## **MEDIA RELEASE - Australian Government cannot let our foreign aid sink to historic lows in the face of potential famine**

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Caritas Australia calls on the Labor Government to honour its pre-election promises by increasing the foreign aid budget next week.

“This budget is coming at an incredibly crucial time. Countries like Somalia are teetering on the brink of famine right now, and the lives of many are quite literally hanging in the balance until the international community responds with substantial and immediate lifesaving aid,” said Damian Spruce, Caritas Australia’s Advocacy Associate Director.

Right now, an estimated 7.8 million people in Somalia are facing severe food shortages, with the lives of hundreds of thousands of people at immediate risk.

“Support next year is too late. Right now, in some parts of Somalia, one in three children under the age of five are close to dying of hunger. We cannot wait until this hunger crisis is officially declared as a famine, because countless lives will be lost before then – and all lives that can be saved with urgent nutrition and health support. We urge the Labor Government to commit to immediate famine relief to prevent this catastrophe.”

The current Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) sits at around \$4.5 billion per year, about 0.2 per cent of Australia’s Gross National Income. The Coalition committed additional funding which has temporarily bumped up our commitments, but it is due to end in the next two years, which means that Australia’s foreign aid commitments are set to drop to around 0.18 per cent, the lowest on record.

The ALP pre-election commitments included four years of funding for international development in the Pacific, Southeast Asia and the Australian NGO Cooperation Program.

Caritas Australia joins the peak body for international development, ACFID, and other Australian development NGOs in calling for a new and additional commitment of \$150 million for immediate famine relief, and a further \$200 million on global food security measures.

In addition, Caritas Australia joins other organisations in calling for \$705 million over four years to go towards climate resilience and gender equality.

Earlier this week Caritas Australia participated in putting together the historic Kioa Climate Emergency Declaration 2022, the first of its kind to be driven from the grassroots in developing solutions for climate resilience in the region. The Declaration calls on the Australian Government and international community to take urgent and effective climate action to save small island communities on the front line of the climate crisis.

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