



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## STOPPING KIDS' ACCESS TO SCHOOLS IS NOT THE ANSWER

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the peak body for Australian aid and development NGOs, is today urging the Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott to reconsider his position on deferring aid spending in Indonesia.

“There are some tough decisions to be made regarding how Australia will pay for reconstruction and recovery after the terrible disasters we’ve experienced. However, as a wealthy country, we are lucky enough to have a number of options,” said Marc Purcell, Executive Director of ACFID.

“Among these, I’d say stepping back from our promise to get poor children into schools is way off the mark.

“Indonesia is our closest neighbour, and as yet none of the Millennium Development Goals have been achieved there. That means that extreme poverty and hunger, as well as child and maternal deaths and access to education are all still huge problems that the country must face.

“Australia’s aid to Indonesia has seen school attendance rates improve, but it is vital that we continue to get kids into classrooms.”

Mr Purcell said that schooling was a stepping stone out of poverty, and that the program put forward to be cut was particularly focused on getting young women and girls into schools.

“International evidence shows that better educated kids have better opportunities to climb out of poverty. As a result of attending school for an estimated nine years, a child can expect to have longer life expectancy, better health and a fair chance at a higher income,” Mr Purcell said.

“Indonesia’s gross domestic product is growing but there is still great inequality across the vast archipelago. Of Indonesia’s population of 240 million people - around 110 million Indonesians live on \$US2 or less per day. The Australian investments in schools have been made in provinces with the worst human development indicators – Sulawesi, Kalimantan and Nusa Tenggara,” he said.

It was former Australian Prime Minister John Howard who signed Australia up to the Millennium Development Goals in 2000.

“The Goals are due to be met by 2015. Deferring funding now will make it increasingly difficult for the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved,” said Mr Purcell.

“The Coalition went to the last election with the promise to the Australian public that they would increase the aid budget, if elected, to 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015.

“Given Australia’s strong economic position in comparison to other nations, there seems little justification for deferring our promises to developing countries,” Mr Purcell concluded.

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