



MEDIA RELEASE

3 August, 2007

Downer Shoots the Messenger: Minister refuses to answer questions on Aid to Iraq

Independent aid watchdog AID/WATCH has rejected claims by Foreign Minister Alexander Downer that AID/WATCH is an 'extremist organisation', suggesting the Minister is attempting to distract the public from an inexcusable misuse of Australian aid in Iraq.

A spokesperson for minister Downer made the comment in response to a report released today by AID/WATCH which raised serious concerns about the use of Aid to further Australian commercial interests in Iraq. Based in part on DFAT and AusAID's own statements, *Determining their National Interests: Australia's Economic Intervention in Iraq* shows how aid to Iraq has been used to promote the interests of Australian companies against the interests of the Iraqi people. The report calls for a thorough public Inquiry into the misuse of Australian aid to Iraq.

AIDWATCH co-Director Flint Duxfield said: "this loose use of language by the foreign minister is a clear attempt to divert the media and public attention from the real issue. Why is Australian aid money being used to prop up Australian business when so many in Iraq are in such great need?"

"Instead of shooting the messenger the Government should deal with the substantial issues which continue to hamper the effectiveness of Australia's aid. Australian taxpayers are entitled to an explanation at this gross misuse of aid funds" commented Mr. Duxfield.

AID/WATCH has called for a full audit of Australian aid to Iraq and has requested that the Foreign Minister explain to the Australian public:

- What benefit has the \$170 million of Australian aid to Iraq in question had for the people of Iraq?
- Why Australian aid-funded officials were involved in the removal of protections and subsidies to Iraq's agricultural producers, forcing Iraqi farmers to have to compete with foreign imports on products such as wheat immediately after a period of intense conflict?
- What were the roles and salaries of all Australian officials in the CPA and how did they provide humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people?
- Why were these dramatic transformations of the Iraqi economy conducted without any effort to consult or inform the Iraqi people?
- Why did AusAID pay Trevor Flugge almost \$1m to remove protections for Iraqi farmers and secure contracts for Australian wheat producers whilst telling the Australian public Flugge was making a "strong and effective humanitarian contribution to the Iraqi people"?

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