



**DRAFT
MEDIA RELEASE**

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First Strike by Government Against Free Speech for Charities

Community organisation, AID/WATCH, has been disqualified from charitable status for participating in the democratic process. The ATO has removed AID/WATCH's charity status because it claims AID/WATCH 'promotes a particular point of view'.

This is a direct attack on free speech and on democracy' said AID/WATCH Chair James Goodman. "AID/WATCH is the only independent watchdog of Australian aid. "We have to raise these issues publicly or else no one will. Charities exist for public benefit. How can we benefit the public if we keep silent?"

AID/WATCH Co-director Flint Duxfield said "It's clear that the government is using the ATO to target charities such as AID/WATCH who speak out in the public interest against misguided policy."

The new ATO decision states that charities cannot engage in 'any activity designed to change Australian Government laws, policies or decisions'. Neither can charities engage in 'propogating or promoting a particular point of view', according to the ATO ruling.

"This is an outrageous decision. It has terribly disturbing implications for the community sector in Australia. If you draw this decision to its natural conclusion, the existence of all charitable civil society organisations is now in jeopardy. Organisations working on homelessness, disability, mental health, environment and all the way across the community sector spectrum may be affected. It is a direct attack on democracy and the right to free speech", said Mr Goodman.

AID/WATCH monitors and seeks to improve the impacts of aid on the planet and its people. "As a charity we have a responsibility to contribute to public debate on these issues. This is central to our charitable purpose. The ATO Ruling threatens our very existence and sends an ominous message to all charities– question Government policy and you will lose your charitable status," said Mr. Goodman

AID/WATCH has lodged an appeal to the ATO Ruling.

Further comment:

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All donations to AID/WATCH of \$2 or more are tax deductible

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