DEVPOLICYBLOG

Australia pledges one-tenth of its fair share for Syria

By Ashlee Betteridge
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Australia has pledged an additional AU $10 million in humanitarian aid to help those affected by the conflict in Syria.

The pledge was made as part of the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference, held yesterday in Kuwait City. Total pledges amounted to US $2.4 billion—well short of the $6.5 billion the UN says it will need this year for the Syrian crisis, one of its largest ever appeals.

In contrast to the huge scale of the need, Australia's pledge seems very small.

Ahead of the conference, a Fair Share analysis [pdf] by Oxfam showed that Australia was one of the countries that was (just) pulling its weight for contributions in 2012-13. But the analysis found that Australia's fair contribution for 2014 would US $95.9 million—unless much larger top-ups are made later this year, we will be well and truly lagging behind.

Last year, Australia also committed to $10 million in the first pledging conference in January. Additional contributions of $12 million and $21.5 million then followed in later months.

Oxfam Australia CEO Helen Szoke has criticised the pledge, saying it is not in line with Australia's capacity to contribute, nor the size of the appeal.

The tight budgetary situation for the current year may be one explanation. The Coalition went into the election committed to cutting the current year's aid budget by $656 million. It has not yet announced where those savings will be found.

Yesterday, host nation Kuwait pledged $500 million in new aid and the US announced a contribution of $380 million. Qatar and Saudi Arabia pledged $60 million each, the EU pledged $225 million and Britain $165 million.Even NZ managed to find $5 million.

A full list of the pledges from this year's conference is available here.

For a unique insight into the humanitarian nightmare engulfing the people of Syria and its neighbours, listen to the podcast of a Devpolicy November 2013 presentation by UNICEF Lebanon Deputy Representative Luciano Calestini.

About the author/s

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Ashlee Betteridge was the Manager of the Development Policy Centre until April 2021. She was previously a Research Officer at the centre from 2013-2017. A former journalist, she holds a Master of Public Policy (Development Policy) from ANU and has development experience in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. She now has her own consultancy, Better Things Consulting, and works across several large projects with managing contractors.

The Devpolicy Blog is based at the Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University.