

Children's Rights Alliance
NEWS RELEASE

4 December 2002, 5:30 pm
For Immediate Release

Child Benefit joins the list of broken promises to children in Budget 2003

Following the announcement by Minister for Finance Charlie McCreevy of the decision to break the pledge on Child Benefit, the Children's Rights Alliance today strongly criticised Budget 2003, characterising it as "a series of broken promises to children, particularly those children living in poverty."

"Budget 2003 presented a number of choices" said Raymond Dooley, Chief Executive of the Children's Alliance. "The Government could extend Medical Cards to low-income children, repair rat-infested primary schools and honour the Child Benefit commitment, or it could keep its promises to cut corporation tax, fully fund the SSIA scheme and continue the low tax regime for the most wealthy individuals. Sadly, it chose the latter course.

"These decisions cannot be explained by citing market forces or a lack of money. The pressures on the Budget were very real, but the Government did have major revenue and spending options available to it. There was no obligation to cut the corporation tax by € 300 million or to put €500 million into the SSIA scheme or €1 billion into a reserve fund. Those are policy choices, and Government has chosen to make them instead of addressing the needs of children.

"Child Benefit is the main financial support for families with children. It is also key to the Government's plan to end child poverty. Both objectives have been thrown into disarray by the Government's decision to break its promise on Child Benefit.

"Cancelling plans to repair dilapidated primary schools was not unavoidable. It only became inevitable after other decisions had been made, such as continuing to provide tax breaks to the very well-off."

The following is a list of the Government's promises to increase Child Benefit:

"We will complete our announced programme of multi-annual increases in Child Benefit and ensure that the combined value of child support is increased in line with our commitment under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy." - *Programme for Government, May 2002*

"One of the key priorities...is to bring forward a program to effectively address child poverty... We are committed to exceeding this [PPF target] by dramatically increasing Child Benefit over the 3 years of the programme..." - *Fianna Fail, Four Year Progress Report, 2001*

"We will complete our programme of multi-annual increases in Child Benefit and ensure that there is no going back to the days when it received only minor and occasional increases." - *Fianna Fail Election Manifesto 2002*

"£330 million for Child Benefit increases in each of the next three years... £25 and £30 increases in Child Benefit with similar increases in 2002 and 2003." - *Announcement of 3-year Child Benefit package by Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs Dermot Ahern, TD, 6 June 2000*

"Child Benefit also offers a most effective means of channelling income support to low-income families in order to tackle child poverty... I am now announcing the second step in this three-year programme..." - *Announcement by Minister for Finance Charlie McCreevy, TD, 5 December 2001*

"Under a three-year commitment given by Mr McCreevy, the [Child Benefit] rates should increase this year to €149 for first or second children and €185 for third and subsequent children." - *Irish Times 30 November 2002*

"We will raise Child Benefit to €150 per month." - *Progressive Democrats Election Manifesto 2002*

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of 72 non-governmental organisations concerned with the rights and needs of children. The Alliance works to secure the full implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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