23rd October 2023

Aid

"Is this nation stating it cannot afford an additional $600 million to help the developing nations become strong … an amount less than this country's annual outlay for lipstick, face cream and chewing gum?"

John F Kennedy, *remarks at a dinner of the Protestant Council of the City of New York, November 1963*

In 2021, the UK Government cut its international aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of national income, a cut of almost £4bn. Ministers indicated that £10bn would still be spent in 2021, including £1.3bn on global health. The World Health Organisation, however, took a different view, suggesting that the cut in the aid budget would leave millions of people at risk of dying from "neglected tropical diseases", as nearly 280 million life-saving tablets would be out-of-date and have to be incinerated due to the withdrawal of the UK money. Two years on, and it's not improving …

If President Kennedy raised this issue 60 years ago, is it not even more crucial now? Notwithstanding the "cost-of-living" crisis, this cut in international aid is deeply troubling. We are still a wealthy nation. Our people are willing to respond to the needs of others (the vast amounts of raised by *Comic Relief* and *Children in Need* for example). But the Government's view appears to be different.

Aid to a stricken country is in the news again as I write this piece, with struggles to open up an "aid corridor" on the Egypt-Gaza border to allow food, water and medical supplies to be taken where they are most needed. The aid trucks have been stuck for too long at the border, while people die, hospitals are overwhelmed and children starve.

Let the aid flow. In the name of God, and for the good of all humanity, let the aid get through. And when the crisis in Israel-Palestine is over – and pray God, it will be soon – let us return to the aid issue. Don't let us be content to see aid only as an emergency matter, or for extra money to be raised through a specific appeal. Let's lobby our MPs and challenge the Government. Let's keep international aid on everyone's agenda. A return to 0.7% of national income would be a start. And more? In the name of God, and for the good of all humanity, I hope so.

A prayer for today

"God is our refuge and our strength,
In straits a present aid."

Help me, Lord, to be the same for others. Amen

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