

Speech given by Bailiff
40th Anniversary of the Overseas Aid Committee
24 October 2008

Madam Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour to have been asked to offer this reception to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Jersey's commitment to devote part of the revenues of the Island to the alleviation of poverty and misery in less fortunate parts of the world. The proposition brought forward by the late Senator Farley was a far sighted one, and was an early signal of a desire and a willingness by Islanders to look outside the narrow confines of their Island home, and to acknowledge that, small as we are, Jersey has a part to play on the world stage. Nowadays the establishment of a national, or even an international identity, is part of Government policy. It is interesting that that great generation of post war politicians, who laid the foundations of our prosperity and well being in so many ways, should instinctively have felt that Jersey people had a responsibility to engage with the outside world in this way, and not to behave as a small, selfish, inward looking community with no interests but its own.

I understand of course that there are differing views on the extent to which the Island can or should increase the amount of money allocated to Overseas Aid. The sum has grown tremendously from £14,000 in 1968 to six and a half million pounds in 2007. It is true that the UN General Assembly have set a target of 0.7% of GNI for development assistance, and that the EU pledged to spend 0.56% of GNI on poverty reduction by 2010, increasing to 0.7% by 2015. We are a long way short of that in the sense that 0.7% of our GNI would amount to closer to 25 million pounds than six and a half million pounds. The Scrutiny Panel and Commission, and indeed the States Assembly itself have accepted that there is a case for an increase in the allocation of States funding for Overseas Aid, and I do not disagree in any way. There are however at least 2 things to be said in defence of Jersey in this connection.

The first is that Overseas Aid from Jersey is "pure" aid, i.e. aid that does not come with strings nor with any obligation on the part of the recipient country or organisation to offer something in return. Secondly, it is fair to take into account the considerable sums of money raised from Jersey people and devoted in effect to Overseas Aid by such splendid organisations as Side by Side.

Be all that as it may, the targeted approach of the Overseas Aid Commission, and the Overseas Aid Committee before it, has brought enormous benefits to numerous beneficiaries in the third world.

It has also brought benefits to the many people who have taken part in different Overseas Aid projects. It is more blessed to give than to receive, and I know that most people involved in these projects have returned enriched by the experience.

I visited Malawi four years ago. Malawi is one of the poorest countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, afflicted not only by grinding poverty but also by the scourge of HIV / AIDS as well. Yet the people are on the whole uncomplaining as to their lot, and warm-hearted and delightful as well. It is a humbling experience to see how appreciative they are of even small acts of philanthropy.

It is a cause for celebration that Jersey has been able to bring some relief to people such as those of Malawi and, even if we can and should aspire to do more, we are entitled to be proud of the achievements of the past 40 years. I congratulate all the members of the Commission, their staff, the volunteers, and all who play a part in this great and important enterprise.