



Dear Friends,

I have spent the last two days with the Micah Women Leaders' Delegation exploring how to build bipartisan support for protecting and restoring the aid budget, and today we met with a very bipartisan – multipartisan even – group: *Minister Anne Aly, Minister Pat Conroy, Senator Jessica Collins, Pauline Hansen, Barnaby Joyce, Senator Deb O'Neill, Senator Dave Sharma, Zali Steggall, Tim Watts and Minister Penny Wong.*

As you can imagine, we heard a wide range of responses! Some believe “*charity starts at home*”. Others want to largely reframe Australia’s aid budget as a strategic security tool. Still others told us – as a group representing Australian Christian NGO’s – we should never discount the moral argument; that people do want to help people!

That has been borne up by the incredible outpouring of contributions for Nepal. **According to the Emergency Action Alliance (EAA) Australians have raised 15 million dollars in just 10 days!** Five million has come from the Australian Federal Government, five million from individual charities, and five million has been donated directly to the EAA by the Australian public.

Minister for Small Business, International Development and Multicultural Affairs, Anne Aly, reiterated the importance of helping others and shared her experiences of visiting, on multiple occasions, the Cox’s Bazar Refugee Camp in Bangladesh.

She then told her own story, concluding that what constantly guides her thinking is, “*There, but for the grace of God, go I.*”

“*We are all,*” she said, “*fortunate enough to be part of the 1% in the world and what this means is that the 99% need us. To respond with compassion, to respond with humanitarian aid and action, is not to behave in a way that is extraordinary, but to be human.*” She looked around the

room at the mix of women church leaders and women international development agency heads and blessed us, *“Strength to your arms, my sisters,”* she said.

This Micah Women Leaders’ Delegation differed from previous delegations because a smaller group were invited and our goal was to engage in discussions to help shape future Micah campaigns. It was also an opportunity to farewell Matt Darvas, Micah Australia’s National Director, who steps down in January.

Matt has decided, with four primary aged children, that he needs to take a role that enables him to spend more time at home.

One of the most moving ‘thankyou’s’ to Matt, for his leadership of the delegation, came from Mary Giotha from Tearfund who spoke of receiving a call from a friend working for the WHO Vaccination Programme saying they’d decided to continue some of their programs, after the withdrawal of USAid, when they heard that advocacy from Australian churches and Micah meant funding would continue from Australia. *“You are looking after your own family,”* Mary said to Matt, *“but hundreds of other children’s lives have also been saved because of the work you’ve led. Thank you!”*

It was a powerful moment. And it brought home what the stakes are. As Minister Aly said, *“being part of the 1% means that the 99% need us”*.

So, can I express my thanks to all of you who so generous in our congregation – who are saving lives in Nepal and Bangladesh and in many places around the world.

Strength to your arms, brothers and sisters!

Belinda