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FOREIGN POLICY WHITE PAPER SUBMISSION

To the Public Consultations Team, White Paper Taskforce

Australia's foreign policy needs to be reset from a narrow corporate and security focus to a more inclusive and holistic approach. The foreign aid budget has been largely redirected to domestic and narrowly defined overseas projects that will harm Australia's long term interests, particular in the Southeast Asia region.

I focus my remarks on refugees as this is my area of expertise. Rather than foregrounding security and the interdiction of refugees in our neighbouring countries, Australian foreign policy needs to focus on being an active participant and good neighbour to Indonesia, Malaysia and other transit countries in our region. This includes working towards a regional solution to the large refugee movement into and through Southeast Asia. It is time to abandon the destructive Pacific II approach that has cost billions and harmed innocent people detained indefinitely. It has also harmed Australia's reputation internationally and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The Pacific and Southeast Asia should not be dumping or staging grounds for Australian border security. We need to rethink our approach to our borders and our obligations under the UN conventions relating to refugees. The good news is that we have better options to stop human trafficking and unsafe border crossings. These options include focussing on better protection outcomes for those in need: refugees. They also demand a more proactive regional engagement from Australia as a bridge builder between destination countries (Australia, New Zealand) and transit countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. This requires deft diplomacy and funding commitments to improve regional registration mechanisms as well as information flows between resettlement states and refugees, UNHCR and implementing partners and the UNHCR and refugees. Misinformation, gossip and rumours act to debilitate refugees, giving false hopes, driving bad investments and can end in death at sea. To counteract them, regional governments and migration agencies (UNHCR, IOM and NGOs) need to improve information systems to better inform refugees about their options, available support and protection pathways.

See also:

<https://theconversation.com/pushed-offshore-the-boat-people-crisis-demands-regional-response-41672>

<https://theconversation.com/asylum-solutions-we-need-a-regional-refugee-compact-16815>

Sincerely
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