

Submission to Australian Government Foreign Policy White Paper

By Australian Red Cross

27 February 2017

Australian Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Australia's Foreign Policy White Paper.

Our submission is based on consultation with International Red Cross and Red Crescent partners, reflecting the voice and position of the world's largest humanitarian movement. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), whose humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war, has made its own submission. Both submissions share a mutual concern for the protection of vulnerable people and the promotion of a more humanitarian Australia.

Growing numbers of people around the world are becoming more vulnerable to crises and instability. The challenges Australia and the world face are complex and interconnected: the impacts of climate change and natural disasters, unprecedented levels of forced migration, persistent and growing inequality, more frequent and protracted conflicts, and resulting economic and political volatility. The combination of economic insecurity and political polarisation is weakening support and trust in democratic institutions and multilateral actors.

Australia is a liberal democracy based on egalitarianism and strong social policy which allows us to address the circumstances of those in need. We are a nation built on migration that has successfully supported multiculturalism with an inclusive and respectful approach to new arrivals. We are a wealthy nation and have worked closely with our neighbors to support significant increases in economic development in the region. These are core strengths that Australia should continue to foster and promote.

Facing the challenges of a more inward-looking and protectionist global environment, Australia must work to ensure that its foreign policy interests and values are closely aligned. It is crucial that it leverages its influence to engage other States and non-State actors to chart a course guided by fundamental values enshrined in international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Australia also needs to communicate better these values and practices to the Australian community, including to groups such as diaspora through greater engagement with civil society actors.

Australia has built its reputation as a trusted top 20 nation that works with like-minded countries to influence other States and shape the rules-based global system. This positions it well as a principled actor in a complex world order. Additionally, to respond to regional and global security challenges, Australia must invest in policies and programs that proactively address the drivers of vulnerability.



Our recommendations are guided by our mission to prevent and alleviate human suffering, while promoting a culture of non-violence and peace. They are non-partisan, and are in line with our fundamental principles of Humanity, Neutrality and Impartiality. They are informed by more than a century of our auxiliary relationship with the Australian government.

As auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, Australian Red Cross has a formal obligation, where appropriate, to support the delivery of public humanitarian services that are the primary responsibility of the government. This includes working with governments at all levels – federal, state/territory and local.

Our recommendations

Our submission articulates the values and principles that should underpin Australia's foreign policy and makes recommendations in response to the following issues identified in the call for submissions:

- how Australia should respond to global trends of critical importance to vulnerable people
- how Australia can maximise its influence in regional and international organisations
- how Government can work more effectively with civil society to advance Australia's interest.

Australia should:

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- 1. Articulate a set of values underpinning its foreign policy. These should be informed by humanitarian principles and reflect commitments made through the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.**
 - 2. Develop sustainable and humanitarian responses to migration in the region including through:**
 - an increased humanitarian intake
 - increased support for first asylum countries and countries of transit to ensure humanitarian needs are met and there is access to fair and expeditious refugee status determination.
 - 3. Work with States and civil society organisations to strengthen approaches to addressing the humanitarian needs of migrants in the region, through a co-hosted annual regional roundtable or other mechanisms.**
 - 4. Ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared more evenly by:**
 - pursuing an inclusive growth agenda both at home and abroad
 - setting accountability targets at the domestic and international level on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
 - 5. Increase up front investment in community resilience, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, drawing on the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific as a policy blueprint. In doing so, Australia should:**
 - prioritise local actors (including civil society actors such as Red Cross)
 - strengthen legal frameworks for disaster risk management
 - ensure climate financing addresses the needs of the most vulnerable.
 - 6. Ensure counter-terrorism measures are not detrimental to genuine humanitarian actors and their capacity to provide humanitarian assistance for vulnerable people.**
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7. Engage constructively in the development of a global treaty banning nuclear weapons.
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8. Use its voice in international forums to promote stronger accountability for States to meet obligations under international humanitarian law.
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9. Continue to build on Australia's leadership and commitment to existing multilateral forums to drive positive humanitarian outcomes.
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10. Ensure that future foreign policy settings support and promote increased opportunities for civil society actors including business, non-government organisations, Red Cross and others to build innovative partnerships to support foreign policy objectives.
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Australian Red Cross: a local to global presence

Australian Red Cross occupies a unique role in Australia and overseas. Established over 100 years ago with a strong domestic and international network, we are able to mobilise 23,000 volunteers in Australia; have a membership of close to 17,000; and over 129,000 monthly donors.

We are also part of the world's largest and oldest humanitarian Movement. The Movement has a permanent presence in almost every country which gives us the unique capacity to mount highly effective global responses to humanitarian needs.

We are a trusted and effective partner to a number of Australian Governments departments including the Department of Defence, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Attorney General's Department, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, and the Department of Social Services. We also have partnerships with State and Territory Government departments and local governments. A number of these relationships reflect our auxiliary role to public authorities in the humanitarian field.

Our Humanitarian Agreement with DFAT also reflects a shared commitment to a safe, stable region. We support Australia's close neighbours to better prepare for and overcome disasters and continue to play our part in Australia's responses to crises around the world, from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq to epidemics like Ebola and the Zika virus.

Linking Australian values and foreign policy

Recommendation 1: Australia should articulate a set of values underpinning its foreign policy. These should be informed by humanitarian principles and reflect commitments made through the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

Australia's foreign policy should be underpinned by a clear set of values. It is critical that Australia's foreign policy emphasise our commitment to humanitarianism and integrate the objectives and targets Australia has already endorsed through the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

Both Red Cross and the Australian Government have committed to upholding humanitarian principles in their humanitarian work. For Australian Red Cross, these principles guide all of our work, supporting our ability to provide services to communities globally to address humanitarian issues.

At a time of instability, Australia's foreign policy needs to recognise the humanitarian consequences of increased isolationism as well as the pressures arising from increased economic and security stresses. It is time to restate humanitarian principles at the core of the Australian Government's domestic and international agendas.

We note that the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* which the Australian Government is adopting at both the domestic and international levels, has asked the global community to **ensure that no one is left behind**. The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* provides a framework that seeks both to encourage sustainable development and security, whilst supporting those that are not benefitting equally from increases in GDP and globalisation.

Global trends of critical importance to vulnerable people

***Recommendation 2:** Develop sustainable and humanitarian responses to migration in the region including through: an increased humanitarian intake; and increased support for first asylum countries and countries of transit to ensure humanitarian needs are met and there is access to fair and expeditious refugee status determination.*

***Recommendation 3:** Work with States and civil society organisations to strengthen approaches to addressing the humanitarian needs of migrants in the region, through a co-hosted annual regional roundtable or other mechanisms.*

Increased vulnerabilities associated with migration

In 2015, global forced displacement reached record high numbers. By the end of 2015, 65.3 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, generalised violence, or human rights violations. This is 5.8 million more than the previous year¹ and the highest since the aftermath of World War II.² Broader migration trends indicate that numbers are likely to continue increasing at current rates, with the number of global migrants likely to reach **300 million by 2030**.³

While the global spotlight last year was on Europe's challenge to manage more than 1 million refugees and migrants who arrived via the Mediterranean, the report shows that the vast majority of the world's refugees and other vulnerable migrants were in developing countries in the global south,⁴ with the largest flow of people across borders taking place in the Asia Pacific.

¹ UNHCR, *Global Trends in Forced Displacement in 2015*, 2015

² Ibid.

³ Kobzar, S., et al. *Evolving patterns and impacts of migration: Global Societal Trends to 2030*, RAND Europe, 20

⁴ Ibid.

With a long standing record of providing humanitarian assistance and protection to vulnerable groups, and as a destination country within the region, the issue of migration is a key area of interest and influence within Australia's foreign policy.

While Australia and neighbouring States have legitimate interests in managing their borders, this can have significant humanitarian impacts and has resulted in migrants taking increasing risks across their journeys. Human security must remain a priority, particularly in relation to protection, access to services and humanitarian assistance.

In our region the key drivers of migration include labour migration, trafficking, refugee and asylum seeker movements, and natural disasters. In recent years, large-scale movements in areas such as the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea have dramatically highlighted the potential risks facing vulnerable migrants while en route to other destinations.

Given the disproportionate impact of irregular or forced migration, it is critical that there are effective responses in countries that host the majority of migrants, including countries of first asylum and transit countries in the region. This should include access to humanitarian assistance and refugee status determination.

Australia must consider its long-term objectives in the region and demonstrate leadership in responding to these issues and alleviating suffering of migrants in transition. Australia should continue to champion regional approaches to migration that account for the reasons people leave (conflict, persecution, poverty, opportunity), the vulnerabilities that exist and develop in transit, and the need for legal protection and social support in their host countries. Australia can contribute significantly to strengthening humanitarian responses to migration in the region with other States and civil society actors through both existing and new forums.

Increasing inequality

Recommendation 4: Ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared more evenly by: pursuing an inclusive growth agenda both at home and abroad; and setting accountability targets at the domestic and international level on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A range of recent studies highlight growing inequality at a global level,⁵ including in developed countries, and the increase in the share of the income and assets held by the richest 1 % or 0.1 % of the population. This development has been constant over the past 25 years and has reversed the trend towards a more equal redistribution of income in developed countries following the Second World War. Over two thirds of emerging and poor countries, encompassing 86% of the population of the developing world, will experience growing inequalities. In addition to moral and political considerations, growing income inequality is now recognised as an economic problem because of its adverse effects on growth and economic performance.⁶

Excessive inequality increases insecurity and diminishes human development. By excluding people from participating in social and economic opportunities, inequality undermines social cohesion and reduces the pace and durability of economic growth. It also weakens democratic legitimacy, as those

⁵ IMF, *World Economic Outlook*, 2014.

⁶ Ibid.

left behind lose trust in institutions of government, business, media and non-government organisations.

Reducing inequality demands a global economic system that spreads the benefits of economic growth. Inclusive growth requires concentrated efforts at all levels, from local to national and regional to global, and involves cooperation from governments, businesses and civil society organisations. Inclusive growth also means equality of opportunities in terms of access to education (for girls and boys), equal opportunities to participation in the labour force and access to markets and resources. By focusing on interdependent needs of people, environment and economy, inclusive growth can deliver a safer, more equal and more prosperous society in the long term.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognise the interconnectedness and interdependence of social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. These goals need to be firmly integrated into Australia's future foreign policy.

Human security

National and regional security has and will always be a goal of Australia's foreign policy. However, we are now witnessing a different and complex set of challenges in our region and beyond. As such, the challenges and drivers of security have changed. To support a more prosperous, peaceful and stable region, we will need to further address the challenges arising from the increased impact of natural disasters, climate change, regional health epidemics, migration, global protracted conflicts and nuclear weapons.

Australia's foreign policy should ensure our collective efforts are focused on addressing the root causes of these issues and should provide incentives for investment in early intervention and prevention, thereby reducing ongoing expenditure on response and crises management. Future foreign policy should emphasize resilience building and support programs that integrate relief and sustainable development, using approaches that build local institutional community capacity.

Regional Security: Natural disasters and climate change

***Recommendation 5:** Increase up front investment in community resilience, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, drawing on the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific as a policy blueprint. In doing so, Australia should:*

- prioritise local actors (including civil society actors such as local Red Cross)*
- strengthen legal frameworks for disaster risk management*
- ensure climate financing addresses the needs of the most vulnerable*

Climate change is one of the most serious development and security challenges. It jeopardises development gains and its impacts will be felt acutely in our region. The IMF identifies that **climate change** is projected to disproportionately affect small states and they will face much larger economic costs. The impact on important economic sectors such as agriculture, tourism and fishing in the Pacific has potential to exacerbate poverty. Changes to Pacific economies and livelihoods also threaten the stability of already complex political and social relations, increasing displacement and migration pressures.

Pacific Island Countries are also disproportionately vulnerable to **natural disasters**. They combine high exposure to frequent and damaging natural hazards with low capacity to manage the resulting risks. On average, the annual cost of disasters for small States is nearly 2 per cent of GDP – more than four times that for larger countries. Climate change is expected to exacerbate the impact of natural disasters and worsen other vulnerabilities of small States.⁷

Pacific leaders are taking important steps to address the risks of disaster and climate change, with the Pacific Islands Forum agreeing on the recent *Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific* through the *Pohnpei Statement: Strengthening Pacific Resilience to Climate Change and Disaster Risk*.⁸ This framework identifies the need to integrate climate change adaptation with disaster risk reduction, and also focuses on the long term need for resilience building.

Given the significant economic and security challenges presented by disasters, and exacerbated by climate change, there remains insufficient investment in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in the region. Globally, just one out of eight dollars spent on disasters goes towards reducing risks, highlighting the major imbalance in global spending on response. Additionally, approaches and funding for disaster risk reduction have not been integrated into mainstream development planning in most countries.

Australian Red Cross experience working in disasters is that investing in long term resilience and capacity building saves lives and protects livelihoods. Our experience also highlights the importance of investing in local actors and institutions that often have local and traditional knowledge and capacity that state actors do not. Coupled with this is the need to invest in strengthening legal frameworks for disaster risk management, including legal preparedness for international assistance.

Why it's time to shift the balance in disaster management

- Disasters cost the world \$92.5 billion in 2015, and even more in economic losses.⁹
- The Asia-Pacific remains the world's most disaster-affected region, accounting for more than two out of five (43 per cent) disasters, three out of five (67 per cent) deaths and those affected (65 per cent).
- Globally, just one out of eight dollars spent on disasters goes towards reducing risks. The Australian Business Roundtable found that every dollar spent on disaster risk reduction saves three to eight dollars in the costs of recovery.¹⁰
- Of the total 3.3 trillion US dollars spent on international aid finance between 1991 and 2010, just 0.4 per cent was spent on risk reduction.
- Red Cross believes it is time to shift the balance. We want a four-fold increase in investment in disaster risk reduction and community resilience.

⁷ IMF Policy Paper, Small States' Resilience to Natural Disasters and Climate Change – role for the IMG
<http://www.imf.org/external/np/pp/eng/2016/110416.pdf>

⁸ Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management [FRDP] 2017 – 2030,
http://www.pacificdisaster.net/dox/FRDP_2016_Resilient_Dev_pacific.pdf

⁹ World Disasters Report (2016) International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent
<http://www.redcross.org.au/world-disasters-report-2016.aspx>

¹⁰ Australian Business Roundtable White Paper, *Building our Nation's Resilience to Natural Disasters* (2013)
<http://australianbusinessroundtable.com.au/our-papers/white-paper>

Global Security

The ICRC has noted that the “brutality and mercilessness” of many contemporary armed conflicts is a cause for deep alarm and that egregious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) are being committed every day, by both States and non-State parties.

The rejection of the basic tenets of IHL is evident in the deliberate targeting of non-military objectives such as civilians, aid workers, relief supplies, hospitals, places of worship and cultural centres. A further demonstration is the refusal to allow passage of humanitarian supplies of life-saving goods and services. Combined, these failures to comply with minimum standards applicable in the conduct of hostilities have contributed to deprivation and increased costs of humanitarian response and are overwhelming the international community’s capacity to respond.

a.) Counter-terrorism

Recommendation 6: Ensure counter-terrorism measures are not detrimental to genuine humanitarian actors and their capacity to provide humanitarian assistance for vulnerable people.

In many situations IHL violations are linked to a denial of the applicability of IHL. Several non-State armed groups regularly reject IHL. In response, States, including Australia, have strengthened counterterrorism measures (including for example certain measures adopted in the *Australian Citizenship Amendment Act 2016*).

However, such responses have had unintended consequences of potentially criminalising some humanitarian action or of blurring of the lines between armed conflict and terrorism, with potentially adverse effects on IHL and humanitarian action.

There is a growing tendency among States to characterize any act of violence carried out by a non-State armed group in armed conflict as being “terrorist” by definition, even when such acts may be lawful under IHL. This situation can present risks for the activities of humanitarian and other organisations carrying out assistance, protection and other activities in war zones. For example, the prohibition against provision of “material support,” “services” and “assistance to” or “association with” terrorist organisations found in certain criminal laws may result in the criminalisation of core activities of humanitarian organisations and may create obstacles to the funding of humanitarian activities. These activities include: visits and material assistance to detainees suspected of being members of a terrorist organisation; facilitation of family visits to such detainees; first aid training; war surgery seminars; IHL dissemination to listed terrorist organisations, among others.

Australia should maintain an active awareness of this risk and ensure that the development of counter-terrorism measures is not detrimental to genuine humanitarian actors and their capacity to provide humanitarian assistance for vulnerable people.

b.) Nuclear Treaty

Recommendation 7: Engage constructively in the development of a global treaty banning nuclear weapons.

At recent international conferences scientists and humanitarians alike have highlighted the significance of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. There is now strong momentum to address this global threat, culminating in 123 nations, a significant majority of UN member States, voting in support of beginning negotiations of a new ban in 2017.¹¹

From a humanitarian perspective, Australia's vote against and boycott of this negotiation process is regrettable. The existing non-proliferation regime, favoured by Australia, has long-failed to deliver and this situation holds little promise of improvement. Preventing the use of nuclear weapons requires States to effectively fulfil their existing obligations to pursue negotiations aimed at prohibiting their use and completely eliminating them through a legally binding international agreement.¹²

Accordingly Australia should play a constructive role in progressing the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework.

Leveraging Australia's role as an influential player in regional and international organisations

***Recommendation 8:** Use Australia's voice in international forums to promote stronger accountability for States to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law.*

***Recommendation 9:** Continue to build on Australia's leadership and commitment to existing multilateral forums to drive positive humanitarian outcomes.*

Facing the challenges of a more inward-looking and protectionist global environment, Australia must work to ensure that its domestic and international interests and values are as aligned as possible.

Australia has a strong history of leveraging its influence as a multilateral actor to shape the rules-based international order. It has built its reputation as a top 20 nation that works with like-minded countries to influence other States. This positions it well as a principled actor in a complex world order.

It is now more important than ever that Australia leverages its influence to engage other States to chart a course guided by the fundamental values enshrined in IHL and international human rights law.

Some States deny the existence of armed conflicts, rendering difficult dialogue on the humanitarian consequences of the conflict and the protection of those affected by it. Ongoing opportunities exist for Australia to use international forums and other diplomatic measures to pressure or circumvent those States whose behaviour serves to exacerbate human suffering.

Access in situations of armed conflict remains a significant challenge for many humanitarian organisations. The difficulties may be due to a lack of understanding of the international humanitarian legal framework that enshrines humanitarians' rights to assist civilians and POWs in

¹¹ UN General Assembly [Resolution A/C.1/71/L.41 on Taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations](#)

¹² [UN Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#), Article 6.

conflict.¹³ In other cases humanitarians are encountering outright denial of access, excessive security risks, logistical problems, and cumbersome administrative requirements.

Australia's nuanced understanding of the complexities of humanitarian access was evident during its tenure on the Security Council wherein it orchestrated humanitarian access in Syria. Building on its well-earned reputation for deft and effective diplomacy on this issue, Australia should continue to use all available diplomatic avenues, including multilateral forums to coalesce support to enable humanitarian access in conflicts.

Australia continues to have an important role in advocacy at global forums that focus on how the humanitarian system itself needs to be reformed to better provide services and access to those affected by crises and disasters. At the World Humanitarian Summit, Australia worked closely with other States and international organisations such as Red Cross, to champion initiatives that will improve the targeting and quality of humanitarian financing (e.g. the Grand Bargain commitment).

Australia's engagement with the Pacific regional organisations is also a good example of how it brings together its diplomatic, aid and technical capabilities – around important regional security issues such as climate change and trade.

Australia has long valued and respected the unique role that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement plays in providing perspectives from the local, regional and global levels to inform its advocacy and policy frameworks where there is an intersection between Australia's foreign policy priorities, vulnerability and humanitarian action. For example, the Red Cross is a key provider of the victim support scheme for the annual National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery which is chaired by the Attorney General and is a component of Australia's comprehensive approach to tackling human trafficking, slavery and slavery-like practices in Australia and in the region. It is a strong model of how a State can leverage its influence with other States and civil society to work together to address areas of deep humanitarian concern.

Enhancing links between foreign policy and civil society

Recommendation 10: Australia should ensure that future foreign policy settings support and promote increased opportunities for civil society actors including business, non-government organisations, Red Cross and others to build innovative partnerships to support foreign policy objectives.

Australia has a strong history of influencing other actors (States, multilateral organisations) on humanitarian, economic and security issues. However, the Australian public is not well informed about this work.

More could be done to promote the objectives, values and principles underpinning Australia's foreign policy among the broader Australian community. Given the rapid changes, growing isolationism and instability the Australian public is witnessing internationally, it is critical that Australia's foreign policy has the support, and mechanisms for engagement, with the Australian public.

¹³ Geneva Convention III, Article 126; Geneva Convention IV Article 143; Additional Protocol 1, Articles 15.4,

Civil society actors, including business, non-government organisations, Red Cross and others play a significant role in various aspects of Australia's foreign policy, including promoting trade, delivering aid and building relationships across States. In the last couple of years, Red Cross has initiated partnerships with the business sector to address humanitarian challenges including disaster risk reduction, building resilience and promoting inclusive growth. Future foreign policy should reflect the growing opportunities for civil society actors to work together and alongside States in addressing complex global problems through innovative partnerships.

Foreign policy settings can support and facilitate such partnerships with the Government playing an enabling role. There may be opportunities to expand peer to peer exchanges with peak civil society and community organisations. The Government's overseas volunteer program has played a strong role in facilitating people to people linkages. It could be extended beyond technical and tertiary education settings.

Australia can also leverage the opportunities provided by its diaspora populations – with 49% of Australians having at least one parent born overseas. These relationships should also articulate the positive contributions these groups have brought to Australia.

-Ends-