

Submission for White Paper on Foreign Policy

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Australia must continue to perform as a global partner to address inequity and poverty

The world is full of problems: war, poverty, hunger, displaced people and climate change know no boundaries. Our security, prosperity and influence can only be ensured when we contribute to overcoming global challenges. We need to seek our national interest in concert with other nations, to shape a future where Australia – and the rest of the world – can flourish.

We pride ourselves on being the land of the fair go. Fairness is reflected in many of our domestic and international policies, none more so than our overseas aid program. Australian aid has helped millions of people overcome barriers that cause poverty, oppression and injustice and to access a good education, quality healthcare, security and sustainable employment. Australia should continue to give people living in the poorest parts of the world a fair go through a stronger aid program.

Climate change is the greatest threat to our region's future prosperity. Environmental degradation and unsustainable use of natural resources lead to more frequent natural disasters and a vulnerable global food system. Australia's future stability depends on a healthy planet, so we must meet emissions targets to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius. Plus, more Australian aid can help our regional neighbours to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Climate change has a devastating impact on the Pacific, whose island nations are among the least prepared to tackle its effects. Sea levels rise, crop yields decrease, fishing stocks are depleted; flooding and erosion threat households and livelihoods. On top of this, the Asia Pacific region is the most disaster-prone region in the world, accounting for 47% of disasters in 2015. The effects of climate change in general, and the level of natural disasters make large scale climate-induced migration much more likely. We must increase our ability to respond to emergencies in our region by boosting our humanitarian aid budget. Even more importantly, we must ensure that a reasonable amount of our budget targets disaster risk reduction and climate change. Most importantly, Australia must meet international obligations to meet our emissions targets to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius, and ban new coal and gas mines.

Education is vital to breaking the cycle of poverty. But conflict, teacher shortages, scarce learning resources, lack of disability support, and the need to work for an income keep about 60 million children out of primary school. Further, children are kept out of school through lack of access to good sanitation and hygiene. Inadequate sanitation causes many children to get sick from easily avoidable diseases such as diarrhoea and girls, especially after puberty, cannot attend school when there are inadequate toilets. Australia must support access to quality education for all girls and boys, no matter where they live.

We need more women and girls in political and economic leadership, to shape decisions that affect them. Gender equality is essential in order to address poverty. A study by CARE International following Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu clearly showed that having gender balance in leadership roles in disaster risk reduction and disaster recovery lead to vastly improved outcomes – including a whole of community approach to caring for the village and for old and disabled members of the community. The outcomes of this study reflect the broader experience that gender balance and involvement of women and girls leads to superior outcomes. Australia

should use its influence to increase the number of women and girls in decision-making roles – at home and around the world. I am very pleased that the present Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, is passionate about empowering women, and this emphasis must continue if we are going to address global poverty.

Australia should prioritise fair trade because it enables people in developing countries to reach their potential, and protects their human rights. It also addresses environmental concerns. The goal of all trade negotiations should be higher living standards and a positive difference in the lives of working people. Fair trade protects workers' freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the right to be free from discrimination, and eliminates forced child labour. I am most concerned by the government's present position that is explicitly encouraging companies that are known to be corrupt, to use slave labour, including that of children, and to leave a trail of environmental destruction behind to be major partners with Australia. Fair trade, rather than free trade, leads to much better outcomes for all. It is imperative that the government does not do business with companies such as Adani. True prosperity can only be reached when everyone is treated fairly and when companies look after the environment, their employees and other stakeholders, and do not increase the profitability through shortcuts that lead to both short term and long term suffering.

The gap between the super-rich 1% and the rest of the world is only getting bigger. Australia must help make the world fairer – by helping other countries develop strong and inclusive systems for education and justice. We must also abolish trade barriers that keep rich countries rich and poor countries poor. And we must urgently address tax evasion by super wealthy companies and individuals. Australia would have easily enough money to play our fair share if we insisted on these entities paying their fair share – as they do in Norway, Denmark and elsewhere. We also need to make sure that Australian companies do not engage in slave labour and environmental degradation in developing countries. Australian companies must be required to show they look after the environment and their workers, pay fair wages, and pay tax to the countries in which they work before they can be allowed to do business there.

Australia must do more to prevent conflict as part of aid and development. This means preventing violence and actively cultivating conditions for human flourishing – like good governance, economic activity and social engagement. Equality must also be a goal. Inequality and poverty is a major push factor for displacement and for people to join extremist groups.

Australian aid is at its lowest level ever (as a % of GNI) while the need for global cooperation has never been greater. Australia should follow the UK's lead and legislate an aid budget of 0.7% of GNI. Australia must prioritise poverty reduction and meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals in addition to developing trade. This is integral to Australia's security and prosperity. For this reason, Australia must commit to aid and to developing innovative approaches to sustainable progress. It's time we recognised the crucial role aid plays in creating a secure, prosperous and sustainable world in which all people are valued and happy.

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