

Introduction

The world faces serious challenges. We're tackling war, poverty, hunger, displaced people and climate change. And where in previous eras challenges were often local and confined, today's challenges cross international boundaries and ultimately affect all of us. Australia should take a leadership role in the global community to help overcome these challenges. We have a track record of innovation and compassion which can be combined to deliver solutions to some of our most pressing global problems. As we do this, we can lead in a way that is uniquely Australia, and which values:

- Justice – a 'fair go' for all
- Equality – particularly for the vulnerable and oppressed
- Compassion and generosity – a willingness to support those who are facing the negative consequences of global challenges
- Openness to welcome those who are in need

We should focus our efforts primarily on the Asia-Pacific region, looking to forge strong relationships with our neighbours and work together to tackle some of the challenges they face, including.

Climate Change

This is the greatest threat to our region's future prosperity. Entire nations in the Pacific are existentially threatened by rising sea levels, and other impacts of climate change on agriculture, fishing and land use. Australia should do all it can to help these nations prepare to defend themselves from changing climate conditions, and should welcome, where needed, climate refugees from across the Pacific.

But perhaps the greater need lies in South East Asia, where increased frequency of severe weather events is likely to cause substantial loss of life and destruction. The Asia-Pacific region is already the most disaster-prone region in the world, accounting for 47% of disasters in 2015. We should assist these countries as they prepare to adapt, and should be ready to provide emergency relief and aid when disaster strikes. This will require an increased capacity and budget to respond.

While not within DFAT's area of responsibility, Australia should take all necessary actions to ensure that we do our fair share to limit warming to no more than 2.0 degrees Celsius.

Poverty

Great progress has been made over the course of the last 20 years in reducing extreme poverty, and Australia has been part of these commendable efforts. We must continue to work with our neighbours and the broader world to tackle extreme poverty. Australia should particularly focus on how to create sustainable incomes and livelihoods for the region's poor, helping them towards not just the basic essentials of life, but towards meaningful jobs. In doing so, we will show Australia to be a supportive regional neighbour, and we will build the capacity of economies in the region to enable increased trade over the long term. We should be ready to give aid to and invest assets in these countries to provide the financial support that they need to find ways out of poverty.

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. Australia must support access to quality education for all girls and boys, no matter where they live.

Health is also crucial. Australia should support efforts to provide basic medical care across the region.

Inequality in many forms

Australia should support regional and global efforts to tackle domestic violence as a particularly insidious form of oppression which can create a cycle of abuse, and consequent poverty. Australia should continue to advocate strongly for oppressed minorities, and should use its influence to be a voice for those who have little voice. We also need more women and girls in political and economic leadership, to shape decisions that affect them. This is vital if we want to ensure gender equality and a more prosperous future. Australia should use its influence to increase the number of women and girls in decision-making roles – at home, in the region and around the world.

Australia should also do its bit to make the global economy fairer – seeking to be an advocate for open trade. This will help our neighbours to prosper and will enable us to grow our ability to provide goods and services into the region. We should be particularly cautious of protectionist approaches which will ultimately stifle our growth and the growth of our neighbours in the long term.

Conclusion

Australia can lead by example, showing what it means to have compassion and promoting solutions that work in the contexts of the cultures and environments in which we work. We have a stable and strong economy that is the foundation of a significant opportunity to welcome people seeking refuge across the globe. We should commit to increasing our humanitarian intake to 42,000 by 2021.

We must live out domestically and promote internationally basic human freedoms. We should make our fair contribution towards foreign aid & development, ideally by targeting the UK's level of 0.7% of GDP, and encourage other countries to do the same. We should focus closely on the Sustainable Development Goals, and measure tangible progress against those goals. In doing so, we should be strongly supportive of innovative approaches to sustainable progress.

The main focus of Australian aid should be on the needs of those we work with, not on our own self-interest. The purpose of aid is to break down the barriers of poverty that stop vulnerable people from reaching their potential. Australia can help the world reach the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and it's time we did so. But there are many opportunities to do good and do well at the same time if we see the value of being a supportive, long-term partner who wants mutually beneficial trade relationships with those around us.

Yours Sincerely,

Tim Macready