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White Paper Task Force
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Submission to the Australian Government's Foreign Policy White Paper

The Settlement Services Advisory Council is pleased to provide the following submission to the Australian Government's Foreign Policy White Paper.

The Settlement Services Advisory Council (*formerly known as the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council*) is an expert, non-statutory, ministerially-appointed body established in 1997. Council members have a strong interest and experience in settlement policy issues and collectively provide expert advice to the Government to guide policy and program innovation.

The Council's Terms of Reference include providing advice to the Government on how to strengthen social cohesion and maximising the social and economic participation of migrants and refugees through specific settlement services, English language, educational and vocational programs, employment pathway programs and programs that maximise the benefits of Australia's cultural diversity and promote the importance of mutual respect, shared responsibility.

The Council would be happy to meet further with the White Paper Task Force to expand on this submission. While the Council has provided high level comments in our response, additional information that is of importance to individual Council members is at **Attachment A**.

Yours sincerely,

Paris Aristotle
Chair, Settlement Services Advisory Council
28 February 2017

1. AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN POLICY NEEDS TO BE GROUNDED IN A CLEAR-EYED ASSESSMENT OF OUR NATIONAL INTERESTS

Global displacement; involuntary people movement

The Western World is one of the strongest powers on an international level with the highest economic, security and educational stability. Australia in particular thrives on its multiculturalism and has embraced the skills and dedications of its migrants and refugees.

Our immigration policies are transparent and we welcome people to our country. However, with the instability in much of the Middle East and parts of Asia we need to do more to address the humanitarian crises that continue to unfold throughout the world.

UNHCR statistics for 2015 show that we are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record.

- 65.3 million people around the world have been forced from home
- This includes nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18
- In addition there are 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement
- Nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution

Australia increased its humanitarian intake in response to the Syrian crisis. In September 2015 it was announced that Australia would accept 12,000 Syrian refugees in addition to the 13,700 refugees and humanitarian entrants that Australia accepts annually (DIBP, 2015a).

While Australia has a long history of accepting refugees for resettlement, to put this in the context of the current global crisis of displacement:

- Australia has settled over 800,000 refugees and displaced persons since 1945
- Germany anticipated that between 800,000 and 1.5 million Syrian refugees arrived seeking to resettle in 2015 alone
- Turkey is hosting 2.5 million refugees
- Nearly 20% of Lebanon's population is made up of refugees

Australian values

Australia is proud of its ethos of the 'fair go'. Australian values espouse:

- a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good, and
- equality of opportunity for individuals, regardless of their race, religion or ethnic background

Australia's foreign policy should reflect it is a multicultural nation and be underpinned by actions that are inclusive, accepting and respectful of diversity. In keeping with Australia's values, principles that underpin our Foreign Policy agenda should include a strong commitment to burden-sharing, to 'picking up our fair share' of the load, in global crises, especially when these result in the displacement of millions of people. This commitment should underpin policy not only within the Department of Foreign Affairs, but within all government departments charged with managing overseas matters (for example: migration, refugee resettlement, education, defence).

The nation's multicultural population should be considered an asset with its citizens and residents possessing a broad wealth of information, experience and knowledge of their home countries, which could greatly benefit Australia's international trade, investment and security strategies. The government should engage more effectively with multicultural populations to build robust strategies based on the networks and knowledge that these populations already possess.

The Australia @ 2015 Scanlon Foundation Study, *Australians Today* showed that on the whole Australians are supportive of this approach with 70-75% of the population indicating tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity.¹

2. AUSTRALIA HAS DIVERSE INTERESTS THAT SPAN THE GLOBE

Globalisation, transnationalism and population diversity

Nearly a third of Australians were born overseas and many more have one or both parents born in another country. Increasing numbers of Australians also live and work overseas. The 'tyranny of distance' no longer isolates us – travelling overseas is quick, affordable and commonplace. Digital technologies allow us to communicate internationally as we do nationally.

The diversity of our population and twenty first century technology help overcome language and distance barriers, fostering connections with the rest of the world.

- In this globalised world, migration has become more fluid, with a trend towards temporary and repeated mobility.
- Trends showing more two-way flows of people between Australia and the rest of the region (and the rest of the world) are likely to continue.
- The trends of people living, working or studying temporarily in Australia is also likely to continue.

The nation's foreign policy would benefit from a stronger focus on long-term solutions to imminent global challenges that see an increase in population movements and migration to Australia. Neighbouring nations, impacted by political change, turmoil and unrest, are witnessing citizens becoming displaced or forced to seek refuge in surrounding countries. In addition, adverse effects of climate change can impact agriculture and employment conditions and force citizens to relocate. These vulnerable populations rely on countries like Australia for resettlement, where they usually require intensive social and economic support to successfully integrate. It is recommended that Australia allocates greater investment in pre-emptive responses to environmental crises as opposed to largely focusing on post-crisis aid and intervention.

Policy should support a flexible, responsive and well-planned migration framework, including Australia's skilled migration programs, that meets our changing needs, maintains opportunities for Australians while building our workforce (skilled and unskilled) and supports our engagement in the region. This framework should model the inclusiveness we claim as an Australian value and provide equal access to opportunities for women and other less-empowered cohorts

¹ Professor Markus, A. (2016) *Australians Today*, The Australia @2015 Scanlon Foundation Survey <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Australians-Today.pdf>

Climate refugees

Since 2009, an estimated one person every second has been displaced by a disaster, with an average of 22.5 million people displaced by climate- or weather-related events since 2008 ([IDMC 2015](#)). Disasters and slow onsets, such as droughts in Somalia in 2011 and 2012, floods in Pakistan between 2010 and 2012, and the earthquake in Nepal in 2015, can leave huge numbers of people traumatized without shelter, clean water and basic supplies. (<http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/climate-change-and-disasters.html>)

In the Pacific region sea-level rise, erosion and coastal flooding are some of the greatest climate challenges. Recent evidence ([published in *Environmental Research Letters*](#)), reports that at least [five reef islands in the Solomon Islands](#) have been lost completely to sea-level rise and coastal erosion, and a further six islands have been severely eroded.

Australian overseas development aid needs to continue to support small island states throughout the Pacific (ODA currently makes up a considerable proportion of the GDP of, for example Tuvalu – 25% and the Solomon Islands – 18%).

In the context of evidence of the impact of climate change on the Asia Pacific region, it is imperative that Australia is proactive in its commitment to meeting and continually increasing emission reduction targets.

A possible solution to address future migration challenges from climate change, would be to build the capacity of populations who are likely to seek refuge in Australia. The government could consider sponsoring a greater number of individuals and families from these populations to temporarily live in Australia in order to gain local qualifications and work experience. They would then be in a position to take these skills back to their countries as well as be experienced, skilled and have networks prior to permanent resettlement. These people would also require less intensive support and have greater capacity to achieve their economic and social goals within a shorter timeframe. This approach would not only save money allocated to their resettlement, but also encourage the reinvestment of crisis funds into Australia's education system through increased sponsorships and economic benefits from temporary migration.

3. AUSTRALIA IS AN INFLUENTIAL PLAYER IN REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS.

Due to the reduction in international aid, the foreign policy should prioritise working with and supporting local organisations to deliver programs in countries where social and economic development opportunities exist. The current processes for organisations to gain accreditation to deliver overseas programs is onerous with significant red tape. Smaller organisations and businesses should be encouraged to engage in international development programs to build their capacity to deliver more effective grassroots initiatives that are localised, cost effective and sustainable.

4. AUSTRALIA NEEDS TO BE AMBITIOUS IN GRASPING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

The Migration Council Australia projects that over the next 35 years, migration will drive employment growth. As migrants are concentrated in the prime working age group and are relatively highly educated they have a positive impact on the employment rate. By 2050, the percentage gain in employment of 45.1 per cent outstrips the population gain of 37.0 per cent. Further, migration will ensure Australia remains a highly skilled nation, as it will have led to a 60.4 per cent increase in the population with a university education.²

It is recommended that Australia continues to invest in technology that allows the nation to keep pace with other countries to maintain a strong platform for small to medium enterprises (SMEs) to continue being globally competitive. Australia currently ranks 50th in the world for average internet speeds, placing local businesses at a significant disadvantage in terms of achieving effective global communication, innovation and production. The nation requires updated technology to improve global business and trade opportunities, thereby boosting our local economy and capacity to engage in international business.

5. AUSTRALIA CONFRONTS A RANGE OF STRATEGIC, SECURITY AND TRANSNATIONAL CHALLENGES.

Divisive foreign policies proposed by influential nations as well as discriminatory public rhetoric and actions often displayed through mass media, are very effective for shaping public perceptions. Australia, as a multicultural nation, is at risk of seeing minority population groups become isolated, radicalised and more vulnerable due to growing media coverage that promote messages of racism and discrimination. These negative messages incite disunity and hatred amongst populations thereby directly impacting on national security and prosperity. The Australian government has a responsibility to protect the rights of all citizens by challenging discriminatory public discourse and actions as well as ensuring policies are inclusive, to improve the nation's reputation and stability.

6. AUSTRALIA USES A RANGE OF ASSETS AND CAPABILITIES TO PURSUE OUR INTERNATIONAL INTERESTS.

The Australian government could better support SMEs to develop their capacity to engage in international trade, investment and business opportunities. They could assist SMEs to connect with Australian multicultural populations to gain offshore expertise on international business practices as well as connecting with relevant networks and partnership opportunities. These connections and information could assist Australian SMEs to explore new business opportunities offshore that would not have otherwise been as obtainable.

² Migration Council Australia & Independent Economics (2015) *The Economic Impact of Migration* p.2

Additional Information

- Australia's national security is of paramount concern. While the countless security checks and processes are essential the time it takes to look at each individual case must be addressed to ensure more efficient processes are in place to enable Australia to increase its intake of refugees in a timelier manner.
- Many refugees are willing to reside in regional Australia, in particular rural areas of NSW, Victoria and South Australia. Policies to encourage regional settlement will result in improving the economic and social aspects of rural communities.