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The Co-ordinator,
International Development Policy
Development Policy Section
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
(development.policy@dfat.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

As a national and international Indigenous mediator and community development practitioner, I welcome the opportunity to input into Australia's International Development Policy Review process.

To begin with, transforming relationships remains a central goal of peacebuilding and depend on what each party brings to a relationship and how they are perceived. This key issue of Australian peacebuilding aspirations are aspects of Australia's history and perceived identity that undermine its potential as a transparent, inclusive, and effective peacebuilder. Our nation's planned First Nations foreign policy is fundamental to influencing national policy makers and staff in multilateral and regional institutions.

At a technical level the realisation of justice for First Nations Australians hinges on creating an atmosphere for peacebuilding, something new to Australia. Genuine stewardship for peacebuilding can evolve across our nation, Pacific, South-East Asian and oceanic regions when Australia begins to resolve its own chequered past on its journey to redemption and liberation. The process begins when First Nations are deliberately included, and voices are heard as the Uluru Statement of the Heart proposes.

The technical argument is clear. First Nations practices for healing and relationship building dispute resolution and collaborative decision making are directly applicable to peacebuilding practice generally. It is relevant to Pacific and South-East Asian contexts where First Nations groups are experiencing conflict. It is therefore essential to begin creating opportunities that enhance community resilience and advocacy. In this way Australia becomes an active party to supporting and advocating those issues First Nations seek to stabilise in their community's such as safety, wellbeing, and

security. *First Nations communities across Australia must be wholly included to articulate those interests in shaping their sustained, ongoing development and resilience, (Executive Summary, Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict (2018)).*

Australian First Nations' relationship to land is acutely significant for their practice of care for their spiritual relationship arising and connecting them to it, closely aligns to the experience of their dispossession of it. First Nations peacebuilders and mediators themselves would be far better represented as the Vanguards of Australian peacebuilding both nationally and internationally. By creating more inclusive policies with First Nations ongoing participation we can avert conflict with strong State advocacy for an authentically, sustained approach in community development and cultural growth.

Land, forms the crux of the issue out of which social and cultural conflicts abound particularly in seeking justice for First Nations people. The First Nations experience of the last 250 years is one of a western legal framework to dispossess the land and an attempted alienation from it. This injustice continues to be felt despite the land rights victories of recent decades as colonisers fail to pay for their use of the land, as those felt by the First Nations people of their ancestral library, as Juukan Gorge is destroyed. First Nations people experience chronic poverty and disadvantage, criminal justice contact, chronic health, and their voices fundamentally go unheard, both domestically and in Australia's global voice. These injustices are seen and keenly felt by other Indigenous peoples, especially in the Pacific, to undermine Australia's credibility and realisation for an effective, transformative building peace diplomatic mission.

The closely entwined issues of Australia's peacebuilding ambitions and pursuit of justice for First Nation Australians can be advanced with several positive actions:


- Implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full, following a process that engages with the full diversity of First Nations people and addressing dispossession from the land by 'paying the rent' to assure First Nations economic sovereignty and assuring State and Community cooperation through intentional, flexible, and long-term support,*
- Protecting country to eliminate conflict over sacred spaces, abandoned mines, scarce resources, correct power imbalances and facilitate the performance of cultural obligations,*
- Significantly resource First Nations peacebuilders to act in Australia and internationally,*
- Engage with decolonising principles to better enable First Nations objectives, health, longevity, to meet cultural aspirations, and language fluency and cultural maintenance opportunities,*
- Creation for a First Nation peacebuilding Institute or significantly resource an Institution of learning in the provision of professional support and development across Australia to enhance cultural and social problem-solving, conflict management and restorative practices and approaches.*
- Enhance avenues and links to enable First Nations cross-cultural exchange programs to enliven knowledge sharing in peacebuilding, skill exchange and collaborative practice to enrich trust and building relationship possibilities,*

- *Sponsor diverse First Nations leaders to sit with diplomats – and create opportunities to become the diplomats – to begin the journey towards a First Nations foreign policy,*
- *Transform Australia’s public debate and polity from its current corrosive conflict, driven norm, to a model of one founded in peace building, collaboration, and mutual respect.*

Australia ought to call on First Nations and invest trust in the longevity and resilience of its First people and not attempt to approach peacebuilding in isolation from them. The capacities and experience of First Nations people in Australia as in the Pacific and Asia are as relevant to Australia’s own peace building journey. By fostering inclusivity and by acting preventively Australia begins to create knowledge from positive experiences exchanged and shared through First Nation practices and inclusion. Australia then can begin to create incentives tailored for First Nations and others promoting, and in advocating for peaceful and sustainable exchange, modelling comportment and upholding responsible communication.

Australia’s approach - its dialogue on peace in the region will then be able to better carry its own humility, desire to establish long term compassionate relationships, with the types of values shared of First Nations ancient wisdoms to become an enriching and sustainable experience for all.

Sincerely,



Helen Bishop

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