



MercyWorks

SISTERS OF MERCY
IN AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Coordinator
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Contribution to the Government's new international development policy

Mercy Works welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Government's new international development policy.

We are a charity, supporting long term development projects in Australia and the South-East Asia and Pacific regions, including Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Timor-Leste. In the tradition of the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, we work and journey with some of the most challenged and vulnerable people and communities towards opportunity, dignity and self-reliance. It is through this lens we offer the following thoughts on the future of Australia's international development policy.

We recognise that national interest is the cornerstone of international development policy in Australia. However, for too long this policy has been captured by short-term domestic political interests, all too often to the detriment of the poorest and most vulnerable in our region. Addressing this issue will be important in securing the credibility of this new policy both domestically and with neighbouring nations, with which Australia needs to maintain and indeed strengthen its ties.

To this end we recommend that the new international development policy be accompanied by a commitment to a funding target for the international development program of at least 0.5 per cent of Gross National Income, consistent with the 2021 Australian Labor Party National Platform. Further, we recommend that this commitment also include a time frame for achieving this objective which should be no later than 2030. Also, but separate to the policy, we would recommend that the Government establish a statutory body, separate from the Department of Foreign Affairs but within the broader portfolio, to administer the Government's international development policy.

Notwithstanding that governments will continue to use official development assistance (ODA) as a tool to pursue their strategic, diplomatic, security and trade interests, we believe that the review of Australia's international development policy should give increased priority to the humanitarian needs of the poorest and most vulnerable communities, in particular those within the South-East Asia and Pacific regions. To this end Mercy Works recommends Australia's international development policy give increased priority, and therefore funding, toward those programs and activities which:

- a) support both the social and economic development of the poorest and marginalised communities in the South-East Asia and Pacific regions,
- b) focus on women and children as well as people with disabilities,



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- c) strengthen and leverage the capacity of in country civil society to design and implement these programs and activities, and
- d) support communities in South-East Asia and Pacific regions to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Addressing these policy priorities will be best achieved through the increased involvement and support of small Australian international development charities (charities), that work in partnership with civil society counterparts in country. We accept that a large part of Australia's ODA will continue to be administered through bilateral and multi-lateral relationships, however Mercy Works believes that Australia's new international development policy should specifically acknowledge the crucial role that charities, especially the smaller ones, play in addressing the needs of the poorest and marginalised communities in the South-East Asia and Pacific regions.

Australia's new international development policy should therefore be accompanied by a significant increase in the available funding to specifically support the work of Australian charities delivering international development programs through mechanisms such as the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). Such support should recognise the inherent risk associated with development activities but actively encourage charities to undertake innovative approaches in meeting the development needs of those people and communities which they support.

This will require a change in mindset in the administration of the new international development policy, one where the contractual and compliance framework encourages rather than discourages calculated risks and innovation in the setting up and delivery of development projects and activities. Further, the rules governing access to mechanisms such as the ANCP should be re-engineered so that they are no longer weighted against small charities through costly and duplicative levels of compliance. We acknowledge that the transparent use and accountability of government funding is important, but those processes should not be so onerous as to disincentivise charities from accessing such funding.

Central to the Australian government's desire to build a new and stronger relationship with its neighbours in the South-East Asia and Pacific regions will be a reinvigorated international development program. We believe that Australia's international development policy and program will require increased funding, a focus on the poorest and marginalised communities in our region and recognition of the role small international development charities can play in securing a safer and more inclusive regional community.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sally Bradley".

Sr Sally Bradley RSM
Executive Director
Mercy Works Ltd