

## UNAA and Melbourne University Initiative for Peacebuilding Submission on DFAT New International Development Policy | November 2022

The [United Nations Association of Australia](#) (UNAA) is a member of the [World Federation of United Nations Associations](#). This global civil society network engages citizens in the work of the UN by sharing information and advocating citizen and government support.

Melbourne University's Initiative for Peacebuilding offers rigorous research into the causes of conflict, capacity to organise and strengthen dialogue amongst a range of actors and stakeholders, to think imaginatively about means for prevention of violent conflict, and strengthen peacebuilding through expert scholarship and experienced peacebuilding practitioners

We welcome the Terms of Reference and this opportunity to contribute to the Federal Government's new [International Development Policy](#).

### Principles guiding our response

We believe engagement with and commitment to UN systems, processes and frameworks is central to an effective International Development Policy. We also believe that international and international development policy do not operate in isolation of domestic policy. We encourage the Australian government to:

- walk our international talk at home
- engage Australian civil society, first nations, business and research organisations, and young Australians in increased soft diplomacy
- apply a feminist foreign policy framework, elevate human rights and integrate First Nations knowledge and ways of relating within international and international development policy
- strengthen Australia's positive leadership within the United Nations
- take a proactive and positive role in the negotiation and implementation of Our Common Agenda to ensure the UN 2.0 is fit for purpose in the twenty-first century.

### Key trends and challenges

We agree with the challenges highlighted in the Government's Terms of Reference.

1. Supporting sustainable and inclusive development in our region is the smart and right thing to do.
2. We must respond to geostrategic competition with a global partnership lens, guided by the rules-based international order and investing in peacebuilding capacity and leadership towards a stronger, more inclusive, responsive, and consultative United Nations.
3. We must work together to reverse the negative trends of the COVID-19 Pandemic and reinvigorate the resources and capacity to achieve the world's to-do list in our region. We can only do this with credibility if we are working to lift our outcomes at home.
4. We must accelerate our commitment to mitigate and adapt to climate change and lead with other nations in the realisation of the commitment to the loss and damage fund to restore trust in our region.
5. There are significant opportunities in accepting the Uluru Statement from the Heart to address human and indigenous peoples rights at home and engaging First Nations Australians in foreign policy that builds on indigenous knowledge and ways of relating using concepts of respect and reciprocity.

Patrons – Their Excellencies Governor General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Ret'd)  
and Mrs Hurley

National President – Mario D'Elia

[admin@unaa.org.au](mailto:admin@unaa.org.au) | [www.unaa.org.au](http://www.unaa.org.au)

UNAA research shows<sup>i</sup> Australia benefits from our relationship with the United Nations<sup>ii</sup>. We believe there are multiple advantages to be gained from increased collaboration between Australia, the UN, and Member States and particularly working to strengthen the UN to meet global challenges.

**We draw attention to the negotiation and implementation of *Our Common Agenda*.** This is the opportunity of our generation to step up to ensure that Australia is a good international citizen<sup>iii</sup> and the UN is the center of an international system in good working order, with strong and adaptable institutions.<sup>iv</sup> Feller and Langmore observe that Australia's contributions to the *Our Common Agenda* consultations under the then Government suggested careful interest in following developments, unevenly focused on a rather select set of issues including lifting gender equity and youth participation.<sup>v</sup> We can do more.

- We support Feller and Langmore's recommendation in their article on the implications of *Our Common Agenda* for Australia, that the government commission a white paper on Australia's relationship with the UN system to shape a proactive and constructive role in the finalisation and implementation of *Our Common Agenda* that Australians are engaged in and support.

**We draw attention to the challenges and opportunities of the 75th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2023*.** This anniversary will draw attention to the Universal Declaration and its 30 articles and supporting agreements and documents, in the context of heightened focus on the long-term impacts of colonisation on sovereignty in Australia and our neighborhood.<sup>vi</sup>

Australia, as a Member State has obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of citizens and to stand up for the human rights of others.<sup>vii</sup> We are exposed when we hold others to account when we do not walk the talk internally in Australia. We applaud the Government's commitment to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full and we will work to promote the Yes case alongside other allies. This is the foundation step to meeting our obligations. There is more work to do across the rights of children, young people, refugees and asylum seekers, women, and LGBTQI+ communities.

- We encourage the Government to invest in initiatives where Australia works alongside our neighbours and other Member States to apply a feminist foreign policy framework and lift outcomes under International Humanitarian Law including extending our rights into emerging areas such as rights to a healthy environment, digital rights and the rights of future generations.

### Development capabilities

We applaud the Government's commitment to rebuild diplomatic capacity and development funding.

- We advocate for much better funding for diplomacy, increasing aid as a proportion of GNI every year as the Labor platform promises, and increasing financial support for Australian NGO peacebuilding like the Melbourne University Initiative for Peacebuilding.
- We recommend and are happy to support generation of new diplomatic, local, and international development career pathways for young Australians and experienced professionals who have skills and expertise relevant to the broad range of challenges we face in our region and our role in the world.<sup>viii</sup> Initiatives may include:
  - increase opportunities for Australian young people to enter diplomatic, international development, and UN initiatives and obligations, including creating a UN presence in the Pacific region.
  - engage and educate more Australian young people of diverse backgrounds and in regional and rural areas on diplomatic, international development and UN initiatives and obligations and UN and UN-affiliated stakeholder meetings.
  - streamline and fund pathways and internships for young Australians to enter the UN family, such as providing more low-cost programs with New York and Geneva.

In a demonstration of the value of this our youth delegate to the UN in 2022 Angelica Ojinnaka reflected on her consultations with young people across Australia when she told the General Assembly:

*A seat at the table is only one part. Young people need to feel like they are able to take the table by the edge and shake it when they feel like their words are falling to the side. They need to be able to establish or bring existing tables. They need to be able to speak alongside voices of all generations and have active feedback mechanisms easily accessible to the majority. Let young people build tables not for you, but with you because these are indeed our tables too.<sup>ix</sup>*

- We advocate for more appropriately qualified Australians to undertake leadership roles at the UN and other international organisations. Australians such as our former National President John Langmore AM and others have made significant contributions to the United Nations' leadership, integrity, and operations.
- We support the Melbourne University Initiative for Peacebuilding recommendations to put peace and peacebuilding at the centre of international and international development strategy. Specific initiatives include
  - investing in peacebuilding capability within regional diplomatic teams
  - investing in a specialist peacebuilding capacity within DFAT
  - investing in a national capability for research, engagement and teaching focused on conflict resolution and peacebuilding within the Indo-Pacific with relationships across DFAT, the diplomatic corps, other international research centres, and national and international NGOs focused on peacebuilding.<sup>x</sup>
- We also encourage the Government to engage First Nations Australians in building and leading peace and peacebuilding initiatives built on indigenous knowledge and ways of relating using concepts of respect and reciprocity.

### National Strengths

We believe that Australia benefits from actively participating in the UN and that the UN can benefit from effective Australian leadership. Australia has a longstanding history of positive and impactful diplomacy within the United Nations on occasions when it has represented the interests of other nations and involved itself in issues of international concern.<sup>xi</sup> Examples include the then HB Evatt's role in the foundation, the first UN Security Council and General Assembly's third President, the then Senator Gareth Evans' leadership of the mediation of the Cambodian-Vietnamese War, the then prime minister John Howard successfully proposing Australia lead the international peacekeeping mission in Timor Leste, Australia working with Luxemburg and Jordan to enable humanitarian access corridors within Syria,<sup>xii</sup> Julie Bishop's roles in the UNSC response to the West Africa Ebola crisis, the MH17 flight crash, and responses to conflicts in Libya and Syria.<sup>xiii</sup> Generally our peacekeeping personnel are well regarded and we have contributed in large numbers to efforts in Papua New Guinea, East Timor, and the Solomon Islands.

- We encourage the Government to reflect honestly on our track record and those occasions where our rhetoric is stronger than our actions, or our action is disruptive to the common good. There are case studies of this in gender, climate change, and sustainable development goals.
- **Gender**

Our engagement on gender issues is 'marked by strong rhetoric but an absence of effective practical measures to date'. Australia has promoted our work on Women's Peace and Security, our commitment to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and our National Action Plan implementing UNSC Resolution 1325. In the recent past, this is contradicted by examples of harassment, discrimination, and violence in Parliament and the Australian Defence Force,

unacceptable outcomes for First Nations women, a widening gender pay gap and continued domestic violence across the community.<sup>xiv</sup>

We recognise that gender equality is the [single most reliable indicator](#)<sup>xv</sup> for conflict prevention and that the inclusion of women and marginalised groups within the leadership, mechanisms, and goals of foreign policy will increase positive impacts for Australia and our neighbours. We believe the UN Secretary General's mandate for a 50/50 planet and underpinning Sustainable Development Goals is a blueprint for an inclusive approach for all aspects of governance to ensure half the world's population is positively engaged and impacted. We recognise the countries that begin to include women experience significant increases in GDP and genuine progress indicators. We recognised that companies with Women's Empowerment Principles at work across Asia and the Pacific are contributing to good business and good economies.<sup>xvi</sup> Australia has shown leadership when it comes to advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda over the past two decades, but there's scope to do more and ensure that it's effectively prioritised.

We recognise Government initiatives at home across Goal 5 Gender Equality begin to address these issues at home and encourage the Government to shape our international development policy with a feminist foreign policy lens.

- We recommend a more systematic integration of the Women, Peace and Security agenda into our foreign policy, aid and Defense operations would improve the longer-term effectiveness of overseas operations and development programs and strengthen Australia's whole-of-government approach to national security.
- **Climate Change**

Our role in climate change has varied widely with the interests of our elected governments. The UNAA will continue to advocate policy and programs at home and in our region to fulfill our commitments under the Paris Agreement and play a leadership role in limiting temperature increases to 1.5°C. We recognise that a commitment to 43% reduction by 2030 is a significant shift on prior policy and that it rests on commitments of 50% reduction by 2030 from Australia's constituent states and territories. We recognise the role of our delegate to COP27 in securing agreement to a loss and damage fund which is critical to restoring trust within our region.

- The most important action we can take next to mitigate climate change and restore trust with our neighbours is to withdraw fossil fuel subsidies and place a moratorium on all new fossil fuel development including extensions of existing projects.
- **Sustainable Development Goals**

Our track record on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is mixed for a nation of our wealth.<sup>xvii</sup> Over six years, Australia's ranking in the global SDG Index decreased from 17th in 2016 to 35th in 2021. The last Government report was issued in 2018 and benchmarking by Monash Sustainable Development Institute in 2020 shows very mixed results.<sup>xviii</sup>

The [Communique](#) and the Report of UNAA's [UN & Australia Sustainable Partnerships Forum](#) in 2021 demonstrate vibrant leadership for the Goals across levels of government, civil, business and research organisations. For a detailed view of the potential of community implementation of SDGs see *Civil Society Roles in UN Sustainable Development Goals*<sup>xix</sup> For a perspective on the alignment between the Sustainable Development Goals and indigenous knowledge and culture see *Gunyaji: Indigenous Lens on Sustainable Development Goals*.<sup>xx</sup> The impact of this work can be lifted with Commonwealth leadership and reinvestment in coordination, support, and measurement.

- UNAA's Sustainable Development Goal Policy Statement calls on the Government to recommit to the Sustainable Development Goals in domestic and international development policy so that our international voice is founded on credibility drawn from our actions at home.<sup>xxi</sup>

## Commitment to stronger and more meaningful partnerships

We applaud the Government's approach to build more mature relationships with our neighbours, by listening and responding with maturity and respect.

Monash University Sustainable Development Institute is consulting now with leaders across the Pacific for the Global Sustainable Development Report for 2023. Pacific leaders are looking for partnerships, meaningful global action on climate change, awareness of their context in the development and implementation of the global sustainable development agenda, and a consistent focus on the Sustainable Development Goals with no bureaucratic changes to the framework until the goals are achieved – they do not have the administrative capacity to shift focus.<sup>xxii</sup> The extent to which the policy is informed by our neighbours' voices in addition to Australian voices and the communication of their input and interests, will demonstrate the extent of the Government's commitments.

- We propose that developing a diplomatic culture of listening and learning from our First Nations Australians and with them, the cultures of our neighbours will be critical to our success and our national interests in the balance of the twenty-first century - learning as a foundation for development is a two-way street.

## Lessons

Our research into Australia's relationship with the UN suggests that we can strengthen the communication to Australians of the benefits of being a good international citizen. Australian attitudes may be shaped by the fact that the link to how benefits flow out and back is not well defined.<sup>xxiii</sup>

- We recommend and will work to support the Government to better communicate the contribution that Australia makes to the UN, and to international development and articulate and promote to the wider Australian public the benefits Australia stands to gain from greater engagement with the UN.

## Performance and delivery systems

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework is comprehensive and multifaceted and enables a means to connect across all sectors of society to take action for positive change. The world's to-do list provides language and dialogue to fundamental changes driven by individual advocacy to industry and business, informing domestic and development policy and governance across the globe.<sup>xxiv, xxv</sup>

- We recommend the government build on the existing systems and frameworks. We strongly encourage the Australian Government to Integrate Sustainable Development Goals and targets within domestic and foreign policy and reporting frameworks. Correlating performance to a globally recognised framework enables transparency and accountability. This would require the establishment of a group of representatives from civil society, business, trade unions, academia, state, territory, and local governments to sit alongside the existing inter-departmental committee to strengthen transparency, collaboration, and communication on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals across all foreign and development policy.<sup>xxvi</sup>
- A fundamental commitment needs to be made for annual reporting, scaffolded by the effective use of big data and delivery systems. This would ensure accountability and transparency of [reporting for the Paris Agreement](#) and other global commitments.

## Conclusion

The UNAA and the Initiative for Peacebuilding will support our recommendations through our networks and programs that engage, inform and inspire Australians about the role and importance of the United Nations, peacebuilding and the Sustainable Development Goals, the opportunities within *Our Common Agenda* and the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the roles Australians can play.

- i The UN's importance to Australia and the world in the era of COVID-19 and beyond A research report for the United Nations Association of Australia Senuri Perera October 2021 provides an overview of Australia's relationship with the United Nations, our contributions, the ways we benefit, and how we might strengthen our relationship. We rely on this research and our related Policy Statement in our submission.
- ii The UN's importance to Australia and the world in the era of COVID-19 and beyond A research report for the United Nations Association of Australia Senuri Perera October 2021
- iii *Implications of the UN Common Agenda for Australia: Renewing Multilateralism*, Erika Feller AO & John Langmore AM (2022); Australian Journal of International Affairs, DOI:10.1080/10357718.2022.2084179 page 3 sets out Gareth Evans' criteria for a good international citizenship.
- iv Ibid page 3 Quotes Minister Penny Wong when in opposition on constructive internationalism.
- v Ibid page 2
- vi The core principle of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is embodied in Article 1 *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.* The General Assembly proclaimed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights Preamble* that the Universal Declaration as *a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations...both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.*
- vii Office of the High Commissioner, United Nations Human Rights
- viii *Policy Statement on Australia and the UN*, UNAA 2022 sets out our position on Australia's relationship with the UN, and includes the following initiatives within its recommendations.
- ix Angelica Ojinnaka Australia's Youth Delegate to the UN in 2022, [addressing the General Assembly](#).
- x Melbourne University's Initiative for Peacebuilding is an example of what can be achieved. Their outcomes include frequent dialogues with the Myanmar National Unity Government about the illegal military coup and steps towards restoration of democracy, analysis of conflicts in the Solomon Islands, launching a detailed proposal for a peace treaty between North and South Korea, planning a major research project on Indigenous peacebuilding across Southeast Asia and Oceania, and strengthening Australian cooperation with the UN. The Centre offers rigorous research into the causes of conflict, capacity to organise and strengthen dialogue amongst a range of actors and stakeholders, to think imaginatively about means for prevention of violent conflict, and strengthen peacebuilding through expert scholarship and experienced peacebuilding practitioners
- xi *The UN's importance to Australia and the world in the era of COVID-19 and beyond A research report for the United Nations Association of Australia* Senuri Perera October 2021 page 28
- xii Ibid, pages 17-18
- xiii Ibid, page 28
- xiv Ibid pages 22-23
- xv *Australia's implementation of women, peace and security: Promoting regional stability* Louise Allen, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020
- xvi *Trends and opportunities to advance gender equality in business in Asia and the Pacific Womens' Empowerment Principles* weempowerasia, UN Women, European Union November 2022
- xvii *The UN's importance to Australia and the world in the era of COVID-19 and beyond A research report for the United Nations Association of Australia* Senuri Perera October 2021 pages 24-25
- xviii *Transforming Australia Progress Report 2020 Update* by Monash Sustainable Development Institute, November 2020. At that time Australia was on track to achieve just two of the 17 SDGs by 2030 – Goal 3 Good Health and Wellbeing and Goal 6 Clean Water and Sanitation. We were losing ground on Goal 10 Reduced Inequalities and Goal 15 Life on Land. We were stagnating with significant challenges on Goal 2 Zero Hunger, Goal 13 Climate Change, and Goal 14 Life Under Water. We have no data for Goal 12 Responsible Production and Consumption. On Goal 1 No Poverty where we were previously on track we were moderately improving and facing challenges. This was also the case for Goal 4 Quality Education, Goal 5 Gender Equality, Goal 8 Decent Work and Economy Growth, Goal 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, Goal 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and Goal 17 Partnerships for the Goals. Australia's progress on the SDGs ranked 31 out of 37 OECD countries.
- xix *Civil Society Roles in UN Sustainable Development Goals* Dr Donnell Davis Human Ecology, Journal of the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council Spring 2018 Issue 28 pages 26-29
- xx *Gunyaji: Indigenous Lens on Sustainable Development Goals* Aunty Ruby Sims and Dr Donnell Davis Human Ecology, Journal of the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council Spring 2018 Issue 28 pages 30-33
- xxi [UNAA Policy Statement on the Sustainable Development Goals 2022](#)
- xxii For a description of the project and blog posts in process see <https://www.monash.edu/msdi/initiatives/projects/global-sustainable-development-report-2023>
- xxiii *The UN's importance to Australia and the world in the era of COVID-19 and beyond A research report for the United Nations Association of Australia* Senuri Perera October 2021 page 40.
- xxiv Raven, Rob. (11.07.2022). Sustainable Development Goals failing to have meaningful impact research warns
- xxv For example, the [UN Global Compact](#) engages 15,000 participating businesses and 3,800 non-business organisations in over 160 countries. These businesses are supported to align their strategies and operations with Ten

Principles on human rights, labour, environment, and anti-corruption along with the SDGs with an emphasis on collaboration and innovation. This community is leading the way in promoting transparency and accountability, adopting the SDGs in their Strategic Plans, and regularly reporting on progress to achieve the SDGs. The higher education sector is no stranger to promoting transparency and accountability, with many rankings leading promotional campaigns. 2019, saw the establishment of the [THE \(Times Higher Education\) Impact Rankings](#). This global league table assesses universities against the SDGs, annually publishing an overall ranking, as well as 17 tables showing universities' progress towards delivering each of the SDGs.