

**Submission from
Initiative for Peacebuilding, University of Melbourne
To the New International Development Policy**

The growth in violent military conflict since the start of the new millennium is one of the major trends which is undermining, and in some countries, destroying development.¹ The number of violent conflicts has been increasing: since 2000 from around 35 state-based violent conflicts a year to over 52 a year since 2015. The consequences of this escalating violence include not only the killing and injuring of multiplying numbers of military personnel and civilians but terrible destruction of housing and health, education and transport infrastructure and massive growth in the numbers of displaced people to over 27 million refugees in 2022, the majority of whom are attempting to escape conflict.² Without determined, and steadily effective peacebuilding throughout the Indo-Pacific region during the next decade domestic and international conflicts will cascade and intensify, preventing development. This submission recommends ways in which Australia's peacebuilding capacities could be strengthened.

The damage to development from intensifying conflict was sufficiently clear in 2016 to motivate the United Nations and the World Bank to cooperate in a striking new way by collaborating on researching, writing, and publishing *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*.³ The UN Secretary-General António Guterres and World Bank President Jim Yong Kim wrote in their foreword that violent conflict is one of the major obstacles to reaching the SDGs and that 'It is projected that more than half of the people living in poverty will be found in countries affected by high levels of violence by 2030'. Therefore, they wrote, it is vital to ask how can the global community prevent violent conflict more effectively? Their institutions' book is packed with analysis and prescription. Yet so far Australian policy, like that of many wealthier countries, has neglected clear expression of how it can support efforts to prevent and respond to conflicts in the region to secure conditions for peace and development. Diplomacy has been starved of funds. Aid has been reduced under successive governments. Peacebuilding as a key pathway for greater human-centred security has been ignored, while military expenditure has been multiplying.

The Initiative for Peacebuilding welcomes the opportunity to submit proposals into the new policy for international development cooperation – especially as it is to guide support for 'a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.' Placing 'peaceful' at the start of the qualities sought by development policy is a profoundly important first step in constructive policy reorientation. Many concrete actions must follow. Peace must be recognised as the principal goal of every country whose foreign policy aims for security, for the most effective way of strengthening security is by preventing violent conflict. Peace, and the justice which is necessary to its achievement, can be the most effective means of enhancing security. Peace is one of the essential foundations which enable people, communities, and nations to flourish.

1. Addressing drivers of conflict and supporting peacebuilding strengthens Australia's relationships within the region

The first necessity for addressing these conflict intensifying times is to be clear about national goals. The basis of this must be clear recognition of Australia's national interests and how **these are inter-related with those of other countries in the Indo-Pacific region**. There is virtually unanimous recognition that the highest priority is national security, so how is Australia's security to be achieved? Australia's most eminent post-war Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, argues that good international

¹ Shawn Davies, Therése Pettersson, Magnus Öberg, 2022, 'Organized violence 1989–2021 and drone warfare' *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 59, Issue 4, July.

² www.unhcr.org 20Nov22

³ United Nations and World Bank, 2018, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Doi:10.1596/978-1-46481162-3. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO

citizenship must be one of the central goals of foreign policy. Good international citizenship requires that states should: seek international peace and security; protect and advance universally recognised human rights; be a generous aid donor; and a collaborative and cooperative participant in attempts to solve the great existential problems of health pandemics, global warming, and nuclear war.⁴ Evans argues persuasively that good international citizenship is not only a moral imperative but also a national interest necessity because it strengthens motivation for action requiring international cooperation; generates reciprocity; and improves national reputations. 'In international diplomacy, as in life itself, the keys to being persuasive, and to working cooperatively and constructively, are being seen to be inherently decent. Being seen to be empathetic.'⁵ Evans writes with authority: he was one of the leaders of the most substantial peacebuilding success in which Australia has ever been involved, the settlement of the complex and shattering Cambodian civil war in 1990.⁶ Violent conflict is one of the most serious impediments to human, social, economic, and environmental wellbeing.

Many commentators assume that international security depends on maintaining an acquiescent alliance with America. That is believed to depend on the volume of our military expenditure, our willingness to collaborate with America's military and intelligence agencies, the size and capacity of the ADF and intelligence agencies, and the sophistication of Australia's weapons and their interoperability with Americas'. This is sometimes interpreted to mean that Australian governments should normally do whatever American administrations want. These presumptions are superficial. They fail to identify rigorously what are Australia's national interests and how to work most effectively to achieve them. Senator Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs spoke clearly about the importance of identifying national interests in a 2017 speech.⁷ She identified four core interests that underpin the framing and delivery of foreign policy: the security of the nation and its people; economic prosperity; a stable, cooperative strategic system; and constructive internationalism leading to a rules-based international order.

2. Increase Australian conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding capacity

Australian diplomats must be amongst the major peacebuilding facilitators. Yet during the last quarter century, the share of Commonwealth expenditure allocated to diplomacy has been cut by nearly half, from 0.38 percent of total Commonwealth expenditure in 1995-96 to 0.21 per cent in 2021-22, leaving Australia with weaker overseas representation than all but one other G20 country. This meant that inadequate attention was given to identifying causes of conflicts, and opportunities were missed for preventative approaches to de-escalating conflict and promoting dialogue.

The Albanese government has acknowledged this gaping hole and promised to end this neglect. Labor's National Platform says that 'Labor will reverse the Coalition's policies of eroding Australia's diplomatic capacity ... Labor will steadily improve the financing, staffing and expertise of Australia's diplomats, enabling stronger approaches to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and multilateral participation.' The mini-budget in October 2022 modestly increased funding for diplomatic attention to both Pacific countries and Southeast Asia but was not close to even comprehensively restarting the rebuilding of Australia's diplomacy.

Substantially increasing aid is essential for stimulating development including by preventing many of the causes of violent conflict, yet though the mini-budget increased aid in the current and next

⁴ Evans, Gareth, 2022, *Good International Citizenship: The Case for Decency*, (Clayton, Monash University Publishing, 2022)

⁵ Evans, *ibid*, p16

⁶ Evans also published a book about the lessons: *Cooperating for Peace: The Global Agenda for the 1990s and Beyond, 1993, St Leonards, Allen and Unwin.*

⁷ Wong, Senator Penny, 'Australia's national interests in a time of disruption', Address to Lowy Institute, (6 July 2017)

three years it did so insufficiently to offset inflation, so that if the forward estimates are maintained, the real value of aid will fall in each year up to 2025-26. This is not close to reflecting the extent of the need for ODA nor does it fulfil the pre-election promise. (WB, UN, 249)

Australian foreign policy needs to evolve to ensure that peacebuilding becomes a central element of international strategy. This requires several concrete reforms. For example, there has been substantial debate in the past about whether important tasks like peacebuilding should be acknowledged within DFAT by establishment of a specialized group, or instead be included amongst the range of professional skills within geographical units. Recent experience suggests that both are required.⁸ There is therefore a strong case for establishment of a peacebuilding group within DFAT which is ready to work with whoever needs assistance in coping with a conflict. Grouping some of the Department's peacebuilders together would strengthen the capacity and collaboration between professional specialists in ways that would strengthen the Department's overall capacity. Establishment of such a professional group would also offer the basis for enhancing linkages with other peacebuilding organisations in Australia and internationally. It is vitally important for Australia to be actively linked with like-minded and motivated groups in allied countries.

3. *Non-government peacebuilding*

Provision of public financing for non-government peacebuilding is also essential. Other well-off countries in Western Europe, North America, and Asia have evolved NGOs as well as public diplomacy to enhance peacebuilding capacity. Civil society organisations have greater freedom than governments to research conflict and to propose and explore means of transforming tension. When part of a high-quality university such centres can undertake research and contribute to analysing causes of conflict, facilitating dialogue and assist with mediation and other peacebuilding mechanisms and train peacebuilders. Examples from amongst many are the Finnish Crisis Management Group (which was key to ending the violent Ache conflict in Indonesia); and Ottawa Dialogue, at the University of Ottawa (which 'develops and carries out quiet and long-term, dialogue-driven initiatives around the world [and which] creates forums where parties can explore difficult issues in an analytical, problem-solving way to develop new paths forward'⁹).

Australia may be the only wealthy democratic country which doesn't have a national NGO dedicated to peaceful international conflict resolution which focuses on three functions: research, engagement, and teaching. There are several Australian NGOs doing excellent work advocating carefulness in addressing conflict and proposing disarmament. The Melbourne-founded International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for its success in advocating the Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons. University of Queensland Peace and Conflict Studies has active education and research programs but is not generally directly active in peacebuilding. There are also a couple of international peacebuilding NGOs with branches in Australia such as the London-based Conciliation Resources.

Australia, though, does not have an adequately funded, Australian-based organisation whose central purposes include each of research, engagement, and education about peacebuilding in the Indo-Pacific region. In the UK, the US, Nordic countries, Canada, and Switzerland, for example, peacebuilding NGOs work cooperatively with official diplomats (sometimes through organising Track II dialogue) and receive substantial core funding and programmatic financial support. The Australian Government would benefit from having such a national centre on which it could call. *The Economist* writes that 'Unofficial channels for diplomacy are increasingly popular'.¹⁰

⁸ John Langmore, Tania Miletic, Aran Martin, and Bob Breen, 2020, *Security Through Sustainable Peace: Australian International Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding*, University of Melbourne, pp 28 - 33

⁹ [Ottawadialogue.ca/about.us/](https://ottawadialogue.ca/about.us/) 14 November 2022

¹⁰ *The Economist*, 25 January 2020, p51

The potential value of such a centre in Australia was emphasised by the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee's Report on *Funding for Public Research into Foreign Policy Issues*.¹¹ The Committee states "that there is a pressing need for foreign policy research and engagement, both publicly and privately funded in Australia." However, the Committee noted that since Australia does not have a culture of philanthropic support for research about international relations, the Australian government must be the primary source of funding for foreign policy research. The Committee acknowledged that "there is a broad consensus across the political spectrum regarding the value imparted by the Australian Government's investment in independent public policy institutes." For example, the Commonwealth partnered with the University of Melbourne to establish the Australia India Institute by providing \$17.6m between 2008 and 2022.

The Committee recommended establishment of a task force to administer a pool of funds for, among other areas, priority themes such as peacebuilding and human security. Such funds would allow employment of professional staff with excellent capacities as researchers, scholarly authors, experienced peacebuilders, and lecturers. Excellent peacebuilders and peace scholars are unlikely to apply for short-term contracts. It would be organizationally naïve to assume that competent academics and peacebuilders would be satisfied with short, fill-in jobs. Operational support is essential for the development of high-quality organisational peacebuilding expertise and if urgent tasks are to be undertaken immediately when requested. It is essential if all three of the purposes are to be undertaken: rigorous, sensitive research on conflict and the effectiveness of peacebuilding; empathetic engagement with peacebuilding processes; and education and training in peacebuilding. Achievement of such mature balance would enable the centre to contribute to reducing the extent, intensity, and danger of violent conflict.

In 2021 the University of Melbourne agreed to establish the first comprehensive peacebuilding centre in Australia. This non-government centre will be a valuable supplement to the capacities and skills of an upgraded DFAT. The Initiative seeks to provide Australia with a nationally based, regionally grounded, high-quality, professional non-government peace centre. The Initiative's mission is to promote multidisciplinary research, teaching, and policy development to support effective engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the Indo-Pacific region. The Initiative's approach is guided by the principles of empirically-demand-driven support to peacebuilding that helps analyse and address underlying causes of conflicts, and to support enhanced official peacebuilding. We seek to offer 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 which strengthens peacebuilding through enhancing availability of expert scholarship and experienced peacebuilding practitioners. Examples of activities so far 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.

4. *Connecting development policy including peacebuilding more closely to multilateral as well as national activity for conflict prevention and mitigating related risks*

It is vital that greater attention be given by DFAT and by scholars and non-governmental agencies to rigorous identification of the causes of conflict and of possibilities for easing tensions and resolving causes, and to political leadership to seek ways of implementing those. Steps like these would strengthen Australia's diplomatic capacity when negotiating with any country concerned about conflict, including the US. This would also strengthen the arguments of the large body of international

¹¹ Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, 2021, *Funding for public research into foreign policy issues*, Senate Printing Unit, Parliament House, Canberra

relations experts within the US who would prefer peaceful means of resolving conflict and who support the international rule of law. As PM Albanese is now demonstrating, Australia's wellbeing will be enhanced far more effectively by strengthening economic cooperation with all countries in this region including the US and China through trade, investment, research, and technical collaboration than by provoking unnecessary disputes. Australia urgently needs to rebuild and sustain mature communication with China, including by identifying common interests where possible – such as in economic strategy, trade, and effective action on climate change, while also maintaining a firm commitment to international law and human rights conventions within both Australia and China.

Rebuilding effective collaboration with other countries in the region is vital. Foundations for such strategies were effectively identified in the 2012 White Paper *Australia in the Asian Century*, though this now needs updating. Physical proximity has always been crucial to these interactions. Substantially increased financial support for education and research about other countries in the Indo-Pacific region, and on forms of assistance including renewable energy technologies and peacebuilding are also vital. The cries of Australian language teachers for greatly enhanced educational opportunities in Asian, Pacific and First Nation languages must be accepted and implemented.

Another related area of policy which warrants attention to improve international development policy is to review Australia's relations with the UN. On one aspect, Australia is exemplary: it always pays its required dues in full and on time. However, the reaction of the previous government to the 2021 UN strategy *Our Common Agenda* had a tone of cool caution rather than an active embrace, and a clear inclination to turn the focus onto what the UN can do for States, rather than the reverse. The *Agenda* is proposing collective renewal.¹² Australia's response before the May 2022 election was short sighted. It must now be reviewed. This is essential if Australia makes a serious attempt for election to the Security Council in 2029-30 as the Minister has said she intends.

One consequence of proper recognition of Australian foreign policy independence is that it would enable Australia to be more active in implementing and advocating *Our Common Agenda*, which of course also includes the SDGs. One vital step would be to form a regional group to start the process of discussing disarmament. This is essential to reducing conflict everywhere, to breaking the habit of immediately adopting military action to address conflict, and to releasing funds for desperately needed social, economic, and environmental programs. It is likely to be a complex and controversial process because it requires multilateral agreements. Yet these are essential if violent conflict is to be steadily reduced. It requires participation in preparation of plans and programs for steps towards disarmament of all forms of weapons. A vital step would be for Australia to sign and ratify the Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons. This would ensure that Australia did not allow nuclear weapons to be carried by either nuclear powered submarines or B52 bombers.

Strong security depends on building peace. This requires that diplomacy be funded sufficiently to ensure that policy evolution to meet the contemporary conflicts and challenges in the Indo-Pacific be fully realized; that wherever possible trusting relationships be gradually built, and imaginative peacebuilding be encouraged. It is crucial that in every situation of conflict of which the Government becomes aware, that focused, rigorous, and imaginative approaches to peacebuilding be automatically explored and considered by DFAT, the inter-departmental Security Committee and the Security Committee of Cabinet. If such a reformed process for handling conflict became habitual it would mean that in every conflict situation conflict prevention and transformation would have been explored; and that the official and public understanding of the full range of options available to address problems are better understood and supported. The existential urgency for renewing how we pursue peace and security needs to be met with renewed commitment to non-violent approaches where preventive diplomacy and dialogue are at the fore. These are essential steps to renewing effective cooperation in the search for security through peace.

Professor John Langmore AM, Chair of Board and Dr Tania Miletic, Assistant Director

¹² Erika Feller and John Langmore, 2022, 'Implications of the UN Common Agenda for Australia: Renewing Multilateralism' *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2084179>