



## Australian Peace and Security Forum

### Submission to JCFADT inquiry into The role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 The Australian Peace and Security Forum (APSF) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry.<sup>1</sup> APSF believes Australia needs a comprehensive peace and security strategy that establishes national objectives and policies for the broad range of interlocking issues in defence, climate and environmental security, human and economic security that will deliver peace and security for all Australians. It needs to bring into the public domain the recent climate security assessment and integrate it into our preparedness and conflict prevention goals. It requires consultation at all levels: democratic political representation; rigorous, expert bureaucratic review; cabinet discussions; comprehensive parliamentary committee assessment; opportunities for scholarly research; free journalism; consultation and community discussion.

#### ***Rethink security***

1.2 Global military spending is soaring, fuelling a new arms race and placing immense pressure on national budgets and priorities. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, a staggering \$2.7 trillion was spent on militaries in 2024. This marks a more than 9 per cent jump from the previous year—the steepest increase since the Cold War and the tenth consecutive year of growth.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, progress on the Sustainable Development Goals is faltering, according to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. Only one in five targets is on track to be achieved by 2030; the annual financing gap for the Goals now stands at \$4 trillion.<sup>3</sup>

1.3 At this critical juncture, the international community must confront the stark reality that rising military expenditures are not yielding greater peace and increasing the destruction caused by war. Instead, military expenditures are undermining our shared vision for human development and a sustainable future.<sup>4</sup> The UN Secretary General's report highlights the twin imperatives to reorientate Government and international priorities away from an unwinnable arms race towards providing the resources needed for social investment, poverty reduction, education, health, environmental protection, infrastructure, and specific investment in peacemaking and peacebuilding—to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

1.4 The Peace Research Institute in Oslo reports that “although the overall conflict landscape remained largely unchanged from 2023 to 2024, it is important to acknowledge that 2024 ranks among the most violent years since the Cold War.”<sup>5</sup> The report suggests that this may reflect the increasing difficulty of resolving conflicts, which have become more complex and

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<sup>1</sup> The APSF is a not-for-profit Think Tank bringing together a broad network of informed researchers, professionals and practitioners working to strengthen peace and security for all Australians by providing information, analysis and opportunities for dialogue with Government and civil society. Website: [www.austpeaceandsecurityforum.org.au](http://www.austpeaceandsecurityforum.org.au)

entrenched. This growing complexity, according to PRIO, “poses serious challenges for international and humanitarian actors, making it increasingly difficult to navigate and operate within the conflict landscape” and to resolve conflicts in the traditional ways.

**1.5 The Australian Peace and Security Forum** recognises that an unprecedented complex blend of domestic, regional and global circumstances is not only creating worsening international uncertainty, but also raises questions about the capacity of government to deal with cross-cutting, overlapping complex crises. Inadequate responses to economic upheavals, climate disruption, the erosion of biodiversity, nuclear proliferation, regional conflicts, cyber threats, and inequality are undermining trust in governments and other social institutions. Conflict prevention must be seen in this broader context and requires an integrated and comprehensive approach to peace and security.

**1.6 Australia's international development, trade and defence policies must be consistent and coherent.** Our concern is that they are currently working against each other. The Australia Government can no longer ignore that a defence and trade strategy<sup>v</sup> aiming to place Australian in the top ten of international arms sales is in conflict with an international development policy that seeks to support conflict prevention. For example, Australia exports arms to the United Arab Emirates which is a key arms supplier to the Rapid Support Forces waging war in Sudan and where Australia provides humanitarian assistance to the people displaced by the war.<sup>vi</sup> Australia also exports arms to Saudi Arabia which supplies the opposite side in Sudan, the Sudan Armed Forces.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Australia's trade with Israeli arms manufactures has been identified by UN inquiries to place Australia in potential breach of the Genocide Convention.<sup>vii</sup> The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Penny Wong, drew attention to how Australia's domestic and international policies have implications for Australia's diplomacy efforts in her 2025 address to the Australian Council For International Development (ACFID) meeting in Canberra when she said, “Credible climate action is the price of entry for diplomacy in the Pacific.” This inquiry must address consistency and coherence in Australia's international policies as a foundation to effective contributions to conflict prevention.

***2. The role of Australia's international development program in building resilience in fragile states, including by strengthening community and civic participation, governance, security reform and human capital.***

2.1 Speaking in July 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Foreign Minister Penny Wong said:

“this region knows too well the cost of conflict and the value of peace...As great power competition intensifies, with the rising risk of escalation and miscalculation, the conflict prevention project is even more critical... Above all, our objective is to prevent conflict, preserve peace and maintain the agency of all countries in our region”.

2.2 In his recent speech to the United Nations General Assembly, the Prime Minister reinforced this theme, stating ‘The more we can do to reinforce the architecture of peace and prosperity,

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<sup>2</sup> UAE involvement with RSF is part of the increasing complexity and regionalisation of conflicts destabilising the whole of the Horn of Africa region with global implications. The huge influx of refugees into Ethiopia, South Sudan, Chad and other neighbouring countries is putting increased burden on both national resources in these locations and the global humanitarian sector. The conflict affects Sudanese families who now live in Australia, creating concern for families back home as well as potentially adding to community tensions in suburban Australia.

the more we remind nations of everything they stand to lose.’ This strong commitment from the Government to conflict prevention and reinforcing the architecture of peace is welcome and must now be translated into strategies and structures within DFAT.

### **Climate change**

2.3 But the architecture of peace must now take into account climate change impacts that are increasingly overwhelming existing approaches, policies and structures. The Australian Government is well aware of this having signed the Boe Declaration that declares ‘climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific.<sup>viii</sup> “As the effects of climate change multiply and worsen, the ability of Australia’s neighbours to cope with the ensuing stress will be sorely tested” according to Adjunct Professor Albert Palazzo<sup>ix</sup>, in his chapter in the APSF Report ‘The Heat is On’.

2.4 “Overwhelmed by relentless climate shocks, many nearby states may well descend into chaos, conflict and war, and become ungoverned spaces as their governments collapse or are removed. Ungoverned spaces are defined<sup>x</sup> as territories in which the authority of the state has ceased to exist because the central government is unable or unwilling to maintain control or influence local populations. Rather than continuing to rely on distance as a source of security, the Australian government will need to manage a future in which climate change brings peril to its part of the world,’ says Palazzo<sup>xi</sup>. In many countries, if not all, climate change will create stressors that threaten the continued existence of the social contract as well as the ability of central governments to exert authority,” explains Palazzo.<sup>xii</sup>

2.5 Australia’s recently released National Climate Risk Assessment recognizes the risk that “a combination of migration crises, resource shortages and more frequent natural disasters could lead to conflict or breakdowns in social cohesion<sup>xiii</sup>.” Climate change impacts on essential services and logistics systems (including, food, energy and water) present risks to social cohesion that cause polarised or fearful social environments, leading to domestic security challenges and civil unrest. The assessment notes that consequential demand for domestic disaster response and recovery assistance, possibly compounded by the need to respond to multiple natural disaster events at home and in neighbouring countries, could result in concurrent pressures and overwhelm the Government’s capacity to respond effectively. **The Australian government will need to decide how it manages the security risks created by climate change in the region and how it can contribute to conflict prevention.** A breakdown in social cohesion in a neighbouring country and the resulting chaos would require significant flexibility for DFAT in working with constantly changing people as different groups contend for control and power.

2.6 “Australia has largely ignored the pleas of its regional neighbours to eliminate its fossil fuel production and use. Australia will need to decide how it responds to a world in which much of humanity lives in ungoverned spaces – where the rule of law is often the same as the rule of the gun. This is a critical challenge to the concept of conflict prevention,” concludes Palazzo<sup>xiv</sup>.

**2.7 As the impacts of climate change increase, Australia must move to eliminate fossil fuel production and use, as well as invest in strengthening the national network of institutions and organizations with a mandate to examine the impacts of climate change in the region and develop strategies for adaptation and Australia’s response.** A strategy to inform the Australian public about the coming climate disruption and engage the public in an informed debate on Australia’s response to climate induced migration from Asia-Pacific (building on the

Australia–Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty<sup>xv</sup> is the world’s first and only bilateral agreement on climate mobility). The resources currently allocated to the AUKUS folly must be redirected to help Australians and the people in our region to plan for and respond to the coming climate crisis.

### ***Building on regional experience***

2.8 Over the past three decades, several overseas conflicts have seen considerable assistance by Australia diplomats, military personnel, police, aid and development administrators and other professional staff as well as substantial financial expenditure. Cambodia, East Timor (Timor-Leste), Bougainville and Solomon Islands stand out as commitments in which Australia played a significant role in reestablishing peace. There has also been significant diplomatic, disaster relief and development involvement in a few other countries, including Sri Lanka, Myanmar, the Philippines and Papua and West Papua province of Indonesia.<sup>xvi</sup>

2.9 The Australian Government and many Australians have considerable experience in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in countries across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. The key issue is how is this experience and expertise is captured and shared within and across DFAT and across the whole of government. **In the light of rapidly changing circumstances, there is a strong case for specialist streams within DFAT and conflict prevention should be one such stream.** A first step could be the maintenance of broad generalists but with the expectation that officers also hold a secondary expertise – of which conflict prevention, transformation and peacebuilding could be a theme. The approach could be investment in all officers having a sound understanding of peace and conflict studies (in this sense mainstreaming these capacities) but also developing greater expertise in some officers that can be drawn on.

2.10 The Development Intelligence Lab recently observed “Australia’s implicit mainstreaming approach may well have made sense in a more benign regional context. But the accumulation of risks within states and ever more salient geostrategic competition mean that there are now strong reasons to step beyond it.”<sup>xvii</sup>

2.11 Experience and expertise can also be captured and shared through training programs (such as by the Diplomatic Academy) and through an active program of exchanges with ‘peace institutes’ in Australian universities. **DFAT should give higher priority to developing and supporting a network of university and NGO based ‘peace institutes/think tanks’, building on the Peacebuilding Roundtables held in 2025.** The one item in DFAT’s International Development Policy that is yet to be addressed, that which calls for the establishment of a national development research agenda to maximise the value of Australian expertise, should be implemented as soon as possible.<sup>xviii</sup> It may also be valuable to encourage DFAT officers to develop greater depth of expertise in specific countries/locations such as Myanmar, PNG, or Indonesia, which may require additional courses or training for that location.

2.12 Several countries in the region, already grappling with underdevelopment and in some cases ongoing insecurity, face pressures to expand military budgets at the expense of essential services. This both entrenches their vulnerabilities and slows progress towards stability and sustainable development. **Australia’s development assistance priorities in the region should include specific investment in peacebuilding and conflict prevention programmes.** Providing sensitive support to analyse the role of development assistance in addressing internal security issues is tricky but if there are ways to support alternative pathways these should be explored such as how to increase inclusion in governance, addressing inequities and

marginalisation to prevent conflict and reduce violent options. There is much to be learned from Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism (PCVE) approaches.

2.13 In a chapter on “Lessons from Partnering for Peace in the Pacific Islands”<sup>xix</sup>, Associate Professor Bob Breen OAM, observes that “one of the masterstrokes of the (Australian) engagement for peace in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands was encouraging church solidarity and women’s social activism to support peace processes”. Breen points out that “neither the Bougainville nor the Solomon Island mandates precluded local engagement, but neither obligated it explicitly.” He concludes that ‘the lesson for ensuring local engagement is to make community engagement for peace more explicit rather than implicit in mandates’.<sup>xx</sup> In conflict prevention and peacebuilding, engaging the local community groups and leaders is critical to ensure that the local people own the peace process along with the challenge to link national dimensions to local involvement.

2.14 Engaging with community organisations and local leaders is an important role for DFAT diplomats who will need tools for conflict analysis and training in making such conflict assessments. Outside organisations and experts can contribute to such analyses, even if they remain confidential. First Nations People should be involved in forging stronger community relations in the Asia-Pacific region and in conflict prevention programs. The release by DFAT of the *First Nations Guidance Note* in April 2025 is a welcome step to greater involvement and there is case for mandating its use in the drafting of Development Partnership Plans for Pacific partners.

**2.15 Australia needs a comprehensive peace and security strategy that establishes national objectives and policies for the broad range of interlocking issues in defence, climate and environmental security, human and economic security that will deliver peace and security internationally and for all Australians.** It needs to bring into the public domain the recent climate security assessment and integrate it into our preparedness and conflict prevention goals. It requires consultation at all levels: democratic political representation; rigorous, expert bureaucratic review; cabinet discussions; comprehensive parliamentary committee assessment; opportunities for scholarly research; free journalism; consultation and community discussion.

**2.16 Making conflict prevention a pillar for Australia’s development assistance will require capacity building in conflict analysis, including joint analysis with host country organisations and coordination across all Australian engagement - including the trade and business sector, mining and natural resources sectors - with the country in question to ensure a coherent approach.** Local contexts are rarely static and being able to evolve the aid program and respond to the changing local context, and possible changing regional linkages, will become more important. Engaging with local community organisations, with women’s groups and relevant national organisations will need to have higher priority in the design of development partnership plans and activities by DFAT.

### ***International experience***

2.17 The experience of other donor countries may assist in designing a new conflict prevention approach for Australian aid. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs in **Ireland** has established a Peace and Stability Unit which supports Irish embassies in their in-country political dialogues and the political dimensions of conflict analysis. In **Germany**, the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has introduced resilience analyses to strengthen resilience capacities

and design risk and crisis-informed policies and projects.<sup>xxi</sup> **Japan** has long made efforts to strengthen coordination between development cooperation and international peace cooperation activities such as UN peacekeeping operations (UN PKOs). In the countries and regions where UN PKOs are deployed, many initiatives are underway that contribute to efforts for protecting refugees/displaced persons, women, and children affected by conflict and developing basic infrastructure.<sup>xxii</sup>

2.18 In February 2019, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD adopted a recommendation focussed on strengthening the coherence between humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) efforts (often referred to as the HDP nexus). Australia is a signatory to the recommendation. Over the past 6 years, the DAC has been working on these guidelines to strengthen policy and operational coherence by humanitarian, development and peace actors.

2.19 The DAC report notes that “the nexus approach was designed to “break down silos” in the international engagement in fragile and crises contexts. Divisions in the international response remains one of the most enduring obstacles to the implementation of the DAC Recommendation. It is important to acknowledge the differing nature, mandate and activities across the dimensions of the nexus.”<sup>xxiii</sup> **Overcoming a siloed approach to development, humanitarian and peace assistance is critical to Australia’s effectiveness in promoting conflict prevention.** The once rigid line between what are considered humanitarian or development needs has blurred, while funding allocations have remained siloed. The DAC also observed that amongst donors ‘the peace objective of the HDP nexus approach remains elusive’. Australia could choose to provide a lead in developing more sophisticated approaches that address the peace pillar in the context of an integrated HDP approach more effectively rather than separating them out.

2.20 People-centred approaches are gaining strength according to the DAC Report. A locally led development agenda should be central to policy discussions on development co-operation. “Supporting locally led development is less about helping local actors navigate access to international finance and more about accepting risks, divergent views and priorities. It requires developing an environment in which civic space can thrive or local governance can deliver.”<sup>xxiv</sup> As mentioned in 1.6 above, **DFAT needs a stronger people centred approach to its development partnerships plans to ensure participation of the local communities is normal rather than additional.** DFAT’s *Guidance Note on Locally Led Development* released in June 2024 is a helpful step, but it does not prescribe and requirements or mandate any compliance mechanisms. Rather is aim to encourage DFAT staff to take action.

2.21 Twenty-five years ago the UN Security Council (SC) recognized women’s crucial role in peace and security and called for increased participation by women in decision-making at all levels and emphasizing and addressing women’s unique experiences in conflict and post-conflict settings. It was an important recognition of the clear link between gender equality and the maintenance of international peace and security, contributing to shaping the normative framework of the global WPS agenda.<sup>xxv</sup> DFAT has given high priority to Gender Equity, Disability and Social Inclusion in its development programs and Australia has had some success in enhancing women’s participation in decision-making and peacebuilding.<sup>xxvi</sup> Ideas for creative, innovative and urgent implementation for peace and security include: prioritise human security, human rights and women’s rights for sustainable peace and security; prioritise conflict prevention over military response; incorporate WPS principles and practice across all peace and security efforts; increase women’s participation in peace talks as delegates, negotiators, mediators, observers.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **3. The strategic use of Australia's international development program to prevent conflict in the Indo-Pacific;**

3.1 In her address to the Australian Institute for International Affairs in November 2025, Foreign Minister Wong noted that the Government's "overriding responsibility as a middle power of the Indo-Pacific is to support peace, stability and prosperity in this region."<sup>xxviii</sup> She also said Australia now dedicates 75 cents of every Australian development dollar to the Indo-Pacific. At the heart of this statement and this inquiry is the challenge to identify how Australia's national interests support peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and define how our funding for international development assistance strategy might best be used to minimise the risk of conflict in the region.

3.2 The erratic and unpredictable changes in US Foreign Policy including slashing tens of billions of dollars in foreign aid and dismantling USAID has raised many questions about future US engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. US military engagement in the Pacific continues to grow, pointing to the possibility of increased rivalry and tension in the Pacific. The unexpected and abrupt slashing of USAID alienated America's friends and emboldened its rivals, including in the Pacific, according to Former US Ambassador to Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu, Judith Cefkin.<sup>xxix</sup> Cefkin contrasts America's retreat from soft power engagement with China's consistent approach to the region and notes that overall, the US's trajectory represents a dramatic scaling back at precisely the moment when strategic competition in the Pacific is intensifying. It is in this context that Australia can make an important contribution to conflict prevention.

3.3 In the wake of significant cuts to overseas aid by several major donors including the US, UK, Germany France and Canada, Australia maintained its aid commitment and made a small but significant reallocation in response to the impact of US aid cuts, shifting resources from Australia's multilateral contributions towards bilateral and regional programs.<sup>xxx</sup> Australia's action in increasing the allocation to Asia and the Pacific from 73.5 per cent in 2024-25 to 74.4 per cent in 2025-26 was a welcome sign of commitment to the Pacific.<sup>xxxi</sup> However, Australia's total international spending on development, intelligence, policing, home affairs, diplomacy and defence remains stuck at around 9 per cent of Commonwealth expenditure, roughly where it was a quarter of a century ago.<sup>xxxii</sup> **As a wealthy nation in the Global South and in view of the climate disruption and increasing inequality challenging countries in our region, Australia should urgently increase its development assistance budget.**

3.4 Australia's Humanitarian Policy recognises that "across the world, humanitarian need is increasing and the gap between acute need and global response capacity continues to widen."<sup>xxxiii</sup> Persistent crises are undermining development, reversing recent gains, increasing poverty and inequality, and contributing to global and regional instability. The World Bank reports that 43% of Pacific states, and 18% of Southeast Asian states are fragile.<sup>xxxiv</sup> In shaping its humanitarian-development-peace approach in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia will need to reassess its relationships with the resident power in the region, China and explore new opportunities for cooperation with China to enhance peace and stability in the region. China and Australia share common vital interests and priorities in ensuring trade, prosperity, and peace in the region. **Australia's diplomacy and international development program could do much to encourage greater dialogue with China and other key organisations in the region such as ASEAN and APEC to address threats to peace and stability.** Such cooperation is possible as has been shown by the successful dialogue with China on river basin management in the Lancang-Mekong Basin in partnership with the Mekong River Commission. There are

opportunities for Australia to build on existing programs to develop a more comprehensive strategic approaches to conflict prevention. This submission considers two: Myanmar and regional approaches.

### ***Enhanced partnership with China***

3.5 Australia should welcome China's economic assistance to strengthen national and regional development and to alleviate poverty and disease in accordance with each recipient country's priorities. China can assist with the development of much-needed infrastructure, far beyond the capacity of Australia to provide. Working with Indonesia and other Pacific countries Australia can actively seek China's agreement for this region to remain a nuclear-free and non-militarised zone,<sup>xxxv</sup> critical to conflict prevention.

3.6 One conflict region where Australia and China have a common interest in promoting peace is Myanmar. The conflict in Myanmar continues across the country, including in Rakhine, northern Shan, Kachin and Mandalay, leading to worsening humanitarian situation and violence that often goes underreported owing to restricted access to communities. Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by the conflict and the dire humanitarian situation; they face increased risks of trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation.

3.7 The International Crisis Group reports that "eight years after a violent crackdown by the Myanmar military forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh, a growing number of young refugees are taking up arms in hopes of returning home by force. Confined to a city-like maze of 33 sub-camps, they have reached adulthood unable to work legally, reliant on dwindling aid, and, in some cases, increasingly drawn to militant groups."<sup>xxxvi</sup> Australia is one of the largest donors of humanitarian aid to the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. This refugee camp is home to more than 1 million and reports of outsiders seeking to arm the Rohingyas to fight to regain their lands in Myanmar could well further destabilise the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh at a time when Bangladesh has substantial internal challenges. Australia has supported ASEAN's Five Point Consensus and remains ready to work with ASEAN and other partners to find pathways that may encourage dialogue between all players.

**3.8 APSF encourages Australia to call on its considerable diplomatic skills to explore inviting China in partnership with ASEAN to contribute to a regional dialogue for a ceasefire in Myanmar and negotiations for peace in the region.** Such an initiative would promote conflict prevention in a post and pre conflict scenario where there is significant risk or regional spill-over.

### ***Regional initiatives***

3.9 The Development Intelligence Lab has noted: the conflict risks within states throughout the Indo-Pacific are very real, in conjunction with and independent of the risks of major, interstate conflict. Australia's national interests are therefore greatly affected by the entire spectrum of conflict risks, from the geostrategic to the local level. A more explicit articulation of Australia's approach to conflict prevention and the 'preventive architecture' ought to reflect this range of interacting risks in the region.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

3.10 As climate change and development pressures build in the region, Australia will need to harness diplomatic skills to respond to emerging challenges. Inter-tribal tensions in Papua New Guinea have in the past arisen unexpectedly and tension along the border between PNG and the Indonesian province of Papua continues. Deforestation and rapidly expanding palm oil

plantations in Papua province are causing dislocation for the local people and threaten social cohesion in the region. Conflict prevention efforts in partnership with PNG and Indonesia are urgent. There remains considerable sympathy across Melanesia with the Melanesian Papuans and the risk of areas becoming ungovernable is high.

**3.11 Australia assistance to fragile states to develop national prevention strategies could include support for the development of national prevention strategies in the Pacific building on the internationally recognised Peacebuilding model developed by Timor- Leste.**

Several Australian individuals and organisations with significant experience in assisting countries in the Pacific in conflict prevention and peacebuilding could assist with such an initiative.<sup>xxxviii</sup> DFAT in partnership with another organisation is developing Guidelines for National Conflict Prevention Strategies that may be introduced by Australia through the UN Peacebuilding Commission. Australia could facilitate the development of such conflict prevention strategies in partnership with a country of the Pacific region.

**4. options for effective support through Australia's aid program in pre-conflict and/or post-conflict zones**

***Stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and support for regional nuclear free zones***

4.1 The most critical step in conflict prevention is to reduce the risk of nuclear war. A nuclear weapon has the capacity to destroy all complex life on earth. Even a limited nuclear war using only a small fraction of the world's nuclear arsenal would cause global climate disruption, from firestorms that would send enormous amounts of soot into the stratosphere, circling the globe, blocking out sunlight, leading to agricultural collapse and the death by starvation of more than 2 billion people in a nuclear winter, according to Melissa Parke<sup>xxxix</sup>, Executive Director, of the International Campaign for Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

4.2 With support from 122 countries, the UN General Assembly in 2017 adopted the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Half the countries of the world have already signed the TPNW, but not Australia. Further undercutting Australia's potential role in reducing the nuclear threat is the AUKUS partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Neighbouring countries have understandably reacted with alarm and anger at the prospect of the greater nuclearization of our region.

4.3 Australia's unwillingness to request clarification on whether US warships, submarines and planes are carrying nuclear weapons when they visit Joint Facilities in Australia does little to build regional trust and undermines the Rarotonga Treaty's pledge to establish the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. **Australia should affirm its commitment to nuclear conflict prevention and ratify the TPNW immediately.** As Melissa Parke concluded "a different path for Australia is possible and necessary. A path that prioritises investments in peace and diplomacy over weapons and war and avoids further harm to people and the environment."<sup>xl</sup>

4.4 In the post-conflict period, Australia has often provided development assistance to support local communities in their rebuilding activities, e.g. in Cambodia, Philippines, Solomon Islands and Bougainville. But integrating post conflict communities and countries into the regional economy has been more difficult. Australia played a critical role in the birth of Timor Leste, especially in conflict prevention, and has remained a strong supporter of Timor's development. The next step in Timor Leste's economic development would be to process Greater Sunrise's output in Timor. Then Timorese people have been waiting 60 years to gain the benefit of their major natural resource. **Australia should immediately seek a negotiated outcome to enable**

**processing of Greater Sunrise gas in Timor Leste to assist the economic development of Timor Leste in this post-conflict context.**

4.5 The international community's recognition of the human-centred approach to security is clearly articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By prioritizing investments in education, healthcare, gender equality, environmental sustainability, responsive governance, and peacebuilding, the 2030 Agenda links security directly with long-term development goals. Investments in these areas foster conditions for lasting peace, inclusive prosperity and human dignity.

**5. *the impact of international development in the maintenance of peace and prevention of conflict, including for early identification and mitigation of conflict.***

5.1 It is important to emphasise, that prevention, as the saying goes, is cheaper than the cure. A recent IMF report, for example, concluded that every \$1 spent on prevention in countries that have recently experienced conflict could return as much as \$103.58.”

5.2 At present Australia places a higher priority on military spending than on international development assistance, including conflict prevention and the balance should be adjusted. Defence dominates the 2025 Federal Budget at approximately 80% of the total \$72.05b spend on international affairs (including defence, development, diplomacy, intelligence, and international policing). Aid has seen the weakest growth over the last 26 years. While defence is set to grow over the forward estimates, aid, and diplomacy more broadly, is set for a real decline.<sup>xli</sup> The impact of Australia’s conflict prevention efforts may well be limited in comparison to its preparations for war.

5.3 While funding is critical, greater attention should be given to the coherence in Australia development and peace policies. For example, Australia is strong supporter of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, providing regular funding for capital replenishments. It has a seat on both Banks’ boards (often in a sub-regional group of countries). **Australia could help lift the focus of the development Banks on conflict prevention by instructing its Board representatives to ensure links with conflict prevention are on the agenda, especially mobilising financing for sustaining peace and aligning national development, peacebuilding and prevention strategies in specific countries.** Australia also sits on the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) where the link between the PBC and the Banks is being considered.

5.4 The United Nations Secretary General’s “The Security we need” report notes that “over time, conceptions of security have increasingly recognized the intrinsic links between development, peace and human rights, emphasizing that genuine security requires the protection and empowerment of people as well as social solidarity. At the core of this approach is the role of “people not as helpless patients, but as agents of change capable of shaping their own futures”<sup>xlii</sup> “This evolving understanding of security is increasingly essential given a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape, where institutions grapple with declining trust and credibility amid interconnected threats. Addressing these challenges effectively calls for integrated responses that bridge peace, development and human rights. As global dynamics continue to shift, it becomes more critical than ever to recognize that true and lasting security comes not only from protecting States but by creating conditions for individuals and communities to thrive” concludes the UN Secretary General.<sup>xliii</sup>

5.5 Despite progress on human development indicators, a recent Human Development Report identifies both growing inequalities and violent conflicts as threats making people feel insecure. It argues that a growing sense of risk and fear of being left behind explain the perception of insecurity globally (UNDP, 2022). Addressing these challenges requires preventative measures, community resilience, and inclusive social and economic empowerment. <sup>xliv</sup>

## ***6. Making Conflict Prevention a priority within Government***

6.1 Speeches by the Minister for Foreign Affairs over the past few years UN General Assembly 2023, UNGA 2024, Indian Ocean Conference 2024 and those quoted above have clearly stated there is a strong commitment to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, but this commitment is not readily reflected either within the DFAT programs or seen by the wider community concerned about conflict. Australia's Humanitarian Policy 2024 states that a policy priority direction is elevating conflict prevention, peacebuilding, crisis resilience in Australia's foreign policy.

**6.2 APSF calls for the appointment of a Minister for Peace and International Development to send a strong signal to the Indo-Pacific region and to the international community about the priority Australia affords conflict prevention and peacebuilding.** It would also provide a clear focus within the Government, Parliament and the wider public about the priority given to conflict prevention and peacebuilding within Australia's foreign policy. The role could be an additional function for the current Minister for International Development and would still sit within the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade's portfolio.

6.3 Appointing a Minister for Peace and International Development (PID) would make it clear that Australia sees peace and development as complimentary as well as supporting a key UN Sustainable Development Goals (especially Goal 16: Peace, Justice and strong Institutions). It would also serve as an important and noticeable signal to the regional and international community. A Minister for PID would provide a focus for Australia's participation on the UN Peacebuilding Commission and our campaign for election to and reform of the UN Security Council. Responsibilities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding remain spread over 3 separate DFAT pillars/ Deputy Secretaries. Appointment of a MPID would help bring greater focus within DFAT and support the Foreign Minister in presentations to Cabinet.

6.4 In lieu of creating a new ministerial role Australia could in the first instance appoint an ambassador dedicated to PID. Australia currently has two Ambassadors in the disarmament area but neither carries the theme of conflict prevention, peace or peacebuilding in their title. Australia has an Ambassador for Arms Control and Counter Proliferation (in Canberra) and an Ambassador to the UN Conference on Disarmament (in Geneva). One of these positions could take on the additional role of Ambassador for Conflict Prevention/ Peacebuilding to provide a clear focal point and enable stronger coordination in conflict prevention. This is an alternative to a Minister as described above but would not carry as much diplomatic or policy weight as a Minister for Conflict Prevention.

6.5 Up until a few years ago, DFAT focussed policy and strategy development in respect to fragile states in the Conflict and Fragility Branch. Following the branch's demise, responsibility for fragility/conflict prevention was dispersed to DFAT country programs, where unfortunately there may not have been officers with knowledge and experience in this specialist area. In 2025, DFAT established the Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch, within the Defence and National Security Policy Division but it appears to be primarily focussed on major power conflict risks.

The formation of this branch is welcome, but it is not clear how it will interact with and inform and cover regional dimensions as well as national country approach.

## 7. Conclusions

7.1 The focus of this inquiry is to examine the role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict, but the delivery of development assistance sits in an international context that currently defines security narrowly in terms of military capability.

**APSF encourages the JCFADT committee to take the opportunity to articulate a human-centred rationale for peace and security with a multidimensional approach rooted in dignity, human rights and sustainable development for Australia's international development program.** Such an approach is essential for a creative response to conflict prevention in our region and globally.

7.2 The UN Secretary General summed up the challenge well in his report, 'The Security we need'. He wrote: "Ultimately, achieving genuine, sustainable security requires investing as much, if not more, in diplomatic, social, environmental and economic instruments as in traditional military measures. Only by embracing a multidimensional and human-centred view of security can the international community effectively respond to interconnected challenges. This is how we create a new era of enduring global peace and stability on a healthy planet."<sup>xlv</sup>

## 8 Recommendations

8.1 The Australian government will need to decide how it manages the security risks created by climate change in the region and how it can contribute to conflict prevention. (2.5)

8.2 As the impacts of climate change increase, Australia must move to eliminate fossil fuel production and use, as well as invest in strengthening the national network of institutions and organizations with a mandate to examine the impacts of climate change in the region and develop strategies for adaptation and Australia's response. (2.7)

8.3 . In the light of rapidly changing circumstances, there is a strong case for specialist streams within DFAT and conflict prevention should be one. (2.9)

8.4 . DFAT should give higher priority to developing and supporting a network of university and NGO based 'peace institutes/think tanks', building on the Peacebuilding Roundtables held in 2025. (2.11)

8.5 Australia's development assistance priorities in the region should include specific investment in peacebuilding and conflict prevention programmes. (2.12)

8.6 Australia needs a comprehensive peace and security strategy that establishes national objectives and policies for the broad range of interlocking issues in defence, climate and environmental security, human and economic security that will deliver peace and security internationally and for all Australians. (2.15)

8.7 Making conflict prevention a pillar for Australia's development assistance will require capacity building in conflict analysis, including joint analysis with host country organisations and coordination across all Australian engagement - including the trade and business sector, mining and natural resources sectors - with the country in question to ensure a coherent approach. (2.16)

8.8 Overcoming a siloed approach to development, humanitarian and peace assistance is critical to Australia's effectiveness in promoting conflict prevention. (2.19)

8.9 DFAT needs a stronger people centred approach to its development partnerships plans to ensure participation of the local communities is normal rather than additional. (2.20)

8.10 As a wealthy nation in the Global South and in view of the climate disruption and increasing inequality challenging countries in our region, Australia should urgently increase its development assistance budget. (3.3)

8.11 Australia's diplomacy and international development program could do much to encourage greater dialogue with China and other key organisations in the region such as ASEAN and APEC to address threats to peace and stability. (3.4)

8.12 APSF encourages Australia to call on its considerable diplomatic skills to explore inviting China in partnership with ASEAN to contribute to a regional dialogue for a ceasefire in Myanmar and negotiations for peace in the region. (3.8)

8.13 Australia assistance to fragile states to develop national prevention strategies could include support for the development of national prevention strategies in the Pacific building on the internationally recognised Peacebuilding model developed by Timor- Leste. (3.11)

8.14 Australia should affirm its commitment to nuclear conflict prevention and ratify the TPNW immediately. (4.3)

8.15 Australia should immediately seek a negotiated outcome to enable processing of Greater Sunrise gas in Timor Leste to assist the economic development of Timor Leste in this post-conflict context. (4.4)

8.16 Australia could help lift the focus of the development Banks on conflict prevention by instructing its Board representatives to ensure links with conflict prevention are on the agenda, especially mobilising financing for sustaining peace and aligning national development, peacebuilding and prevention strategies in specific countries. (5.3)

8.17 APSF calls for the appointment of a Minister for Peace and International Development to send a strong signal to the Indo-Pacific region and to the international community about the priority Australia affords conflict prevention and peacebuilding. (6.2)

8.18 APSF encourages the JCFADT committee to take the opportunity to articulate a human-centred rationale for peace and security with a multidimensional approach rooted in dignity, human rights and sustainable development for Australia's international development program. (7.1)

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<sup>v</sup> Australia Defence Export Strategy [Defence Export Strategy | Business & Industry | Defence](#)

<sup>vi</sup> Wintour Patrick, 'As criticism grows, is UAE ready to walk away from Sudan's RSF militia?' The Guardian, 4 Nov 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/nov/04/sudan-rsf-militia-uae-united-arab-emirates>

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<sup>viii</sup> Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe declaration on regional security*, 2018. <https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Boe-Declaration-on-Regional-Security.pdf>

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<sup>xi</sup> Ibid p28

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid p 29

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<sup>xix</sup> Langmore et al, op cit p20

<sup>xx</sup> Langmore et al, op cit p22

<sup>xxi</sup> OECD. 2023. Report on the implementation, dissemination and continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, DCD/DAC/INCAF(2023)1/FINAL OECD Paris. P44

<sup>xxii</sup> [White Paper on Development Cooperation 2023 | Part III 2 Realizing Peaceful, Secure, and Stable Societies, and Maintenance and Strengthening of a Free and Open International Order Based on the Rule of Law | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#)

<sup>xxiii</sup> OECD 2023 op cit p5

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid p6

<sup>xxv</sup> Kvitko L. "Crucial role for women in peace and security", in *Staying Alive*. APSF 2025.p 24

<sup>xxvi</sup> Langmore et al op cit p38

<sup>xxvii</sup> Kvitko op cit p26

<sup>xxviii</sup> Foreign Minister Senator the Hon Penny Wong, AIIA Gala Dinner Keynote Address 17 November 2025. <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/aiia-gala-dinner-keynote-address>

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