

Submission on Foreign Policy White Paper

Caritas Australia

About Caritas Australia

Caritas Australia (CA) is the international aid and development agency of the Catholic Church in Australia. It is a member of the world's second largest humanitarian network, Caritas Internationalis, which has more than 500,000 staff and 20 million volunteers operating through 165 national Caritas agencies. Caritas Australia maintains close links with counterpart Church agencies across the Asia-Pacific region on a wide range of policy issues. It is also an active member of the Australian Council for International Development and the Australian Church Agencies Network.

Our work over the last 52 years has been to uphold human dignity and promote justice in marginalised and poor communities, mainly in Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa and with 11 First Australian agencies. Our programs focus on vulnerable communities regardless of their ethnicity, political beliefs or religion.

In 2015–16, we supported 129 long-term community programs and 120 partnerships in 29 countries, as well as 35 emergency response programs in 24 countries. Caritas Australia reached over 2 million people directly through emergency and development programs.

Program activities are driven and implemented by local community partners and all programs involve stakeholder analysis that identify potential linkages with business and government partners. This approach has succeeded in assisting millions of people to take charge of their own futures over the last five decades.

Summary

In reviewing the previous 40 years of Australian foreign policy, former Foreign Minister Alexander Downer observed that:

“the Australian people will not support any government that conducts its foreign policy divorced from their values, which underpin our own society.”ⁱ

In a similar vein, former Treasurer Peter Costello argued that Australian society is based on beliefs in compassion for those in difficulty and in justice because “the single most decisive feature that determined how Australia would develop was our Judeo- Christian tradition”.ⁱⁱ

CA endorses these assessments and urges that the White Paper explicitly link a future foreign policy framework with Australian community values. As unfashionable as this proposition among policy makers currently, the longer term sustainability and effectiveness of Australian foreign policy hinges on the application to policy of Mr Downer's simple observation.

An optimal foreign policy architecture for Australia would have diplomacy, defence and international aid and development as its three pillars.

Recommendations:

- 1) That the White Paper explicitly recognise Australian community values as being central in the shaping of Australia's foreign policy architecture.
- 2) That the White Paper identify Australia's aid and development contribution to foreign policy goals as being central to the pursuit of Australia's national interest, not as a subsidiary program.
- 3) That the White Paper identify three key pillars for a successful Australian foreign policy - diplomacy, defence and international aid and development.

Recommendation 1

That the White Paper explicitly recognise Australian community values as being central in the shaping of Australia's foreign policy architecture.

In addition to the comments by the former Foreign Minister and Treasurer, Prime Minister Turnbull has highlighted the values which underpin all aspects of Australian public policy. On Australia Day 2017, he commented that:

"We are compassionate, we are resilient, and we are genuine. We have a deep commitment to our uniquely egalitarian democracy. "

Beyond our current period, we can only comprehend the nature and scale of Australia's contributions on the world stage over the last century or more by reference to core community values.

Since the outbreak of a World War 1 Australia has been actively engaged in global and regional security, political and economic affairs. The scale of Australia's role in the two world wars was remarkable by any measure for such a small population. For example, nearly 40% of male citizens enlisted in WW1. Of these, 217,000 were killed and twice that number seriously injured. One quarter of our adult population served in WW2. Since then, Australian forces have served in many other military theatres and contributed to almost 100 peace-keeping missions around the world.

This pattern of engagement has been done on a bipartisan basis and is disproportionate to Australia's population and economic size, as well as to Australia's geographic location. This pattern of global engagement through contributions related to security, diplomatic initiatives and international development led to Australia being widely referred to as a "constructive middle power" for the six decades after WW2.

The central feature of that bipartisan engagement was its firm base in the values held by the Australian community. This history as a constructive middle power is in stark contrast to the much narrower conception of Australia's national interest which has become commonplace among Australian policymakers over the last decade.

Australian values

Australia is one of the world's most multicultural societies and one now actively seeking to address the historic injustice to its First Peoples and move forward. Despite the huge diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, Australian society is bound together by shared values which define a distinct national identity.

As Prime Minister Turnbull explained on Australia Day this year, a unique form of egalitarianism is at the heart of who we are as people. In his congratulatory remarks to the Australians of the Year, he highlighted the qualities with which most Australians naturally identify. They are care and service to others, especially those who are "doing it tough" and tenacity to keep going despite the odds.

Tangible reference points for our national values base are not hard to find. Of the 140 countries regularly surveyed by the global Charities Aid Foundation, Australia ranked third in 2016 for its level of private giving. Australia has also continued to rank as one of the world's leaders in citizen volunteering.

These and many other indicators reflect the core community values upon which national public policy has been based over many decades. At the heart of this set of values is the principle that people who have suffered deprivation deserve to be assisted. This idea of 'a fair go' remains central to the Australian ethos and explains the extraordinary scale of private giving in response to international disasters.

Former Prime Minister John Howard articulated this when he explained his decisions to commit \$1 billion to assist the victims of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami in Indonesia and also when in his robust support people of East Timor during the military and political turbulence in 1999. He said that no Australian should doubt that this country had to intervene "*to help people rebuild their shattered lives and safeguard their freedom*". He argued that this response reflected the community value of "a fair go".ⁱⁱⁱ The \$350 million of spontaneous Australian community giving in response to that natural disaster tends to affirm his notion of who we are as a people.

A values-based foreign policy

Australia has a proud history as a middle power on the world stage since the end of World War Two. In addition to playing a significant role in the formation of the United Nations and other global institutions, Australia has been a conspicuous and consistent proponent of a rules-based world order. Australia's contribution to multilateral peace-building and peacekeeping interventions beyond our own region is further testament to this.

As a result of this pattern of diplomatic, defence and aid engagement, Australia developed a distinct reputation around the world not being focussed solely on its self-interest. Our diplomatic, security and international development contributions were seen to be grounded in Australian community values. This enabled successive Australian leaders to project Australia as a good international citizen beyond a narrow self-interest.

Foreign Minister Bishop has continued this tradition in leading work on a resolution at the Security Council to enable humanitarian assistance to be delivered in Syria, exerting pressure on Russia after the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 was shot down over Ukraine and putting North Korea's human rights situation on the record.

Australian governments have also contributed effectively through diplomatic work on international norms and global standards and the shape of multilateral institutions ranging from trade and agriculture, human rights, the environment, global economic development, as well as regional cooperation. As a founding member of the G20, and in the recent two year presidential term, Australia played a political leadership role on a range of challenging global economic matters.^{iv}

Similarly, in multilateral negotiations in the World Trade Organisation and as the creator and coordinator of the Cairns Group, Australia has championed trade liberalisation and cuts to distortions that skew trade to the detriment of many developing countries. Australia's successful initiative in creating APEC and co-leadership with Canada in achieving the Montreal Protocol provide evidence of why Australia came to be seen as a "constructive middle power.

In short, through 60 years of global engagement, Australia was accurately assessed by governments around the world as going well beyond the type of national self-interest agenda which is now so much the focus of Australian policy makers.

Recommendation 2

That the White Paper identify Australia's aid and development contribution to foreign policy as being central to the pursuit Australia's national interest, not as a subsidiary program.

Development assistance has been an important part of Australia's international engagement throughout the period after WW2. Australia is the only OECD country surrounded by developing countries, and, since the 1950s, Australia has played a valued role to successive governments in South East Asia and the Pacific island states in their nation building efforts.

Indeed, the former political leaders of Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia regarded the long term and low profile Australian aid and development support in the decades after their independence as most valuable for their country's transition towards stability and prosperity.

Some recent examples include:

- Australian Government support to the GAVI Alliance has contributed to immunisation of over 257 million children and the prevention of 5.4 million deaths.^v
- In one year alone, through our bilateral aid in Vietnam, an additional 2.5 million people had access to clean drinking water and 756,000 households had access to latrines.^{vi}
- Between July 2015 and April 2016, Australia responded to 20 humanitarian crises, providing \$167 million in life-saving assistance.^{vii}

The Australian aid program is part of collective international effort to end extreme poverty, promote prosperity and ensure that the rights of people are respected. This collective effort has achieved huge improvements in public health, access to clean water and in the proportion of children going to school.

In September 2015 the political leaders of 150 countries committed their countries to the Sustainable Development Goals framework. Together with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Addis Ababa Agenda on Financing for Development, there is now a coherent and costed framework to create a more just and sustainable world.

Given Australia's position as a one of the wealthiest nations on earth and one which has an impressive record of contributing beyond its narrow self-interest, the White Paper provides an important opportunity to demonstrate Mr Downer's conclusion mentioned above about the essential link of foreign policy to community values. Moreover, with respect to international aid, most Australians want their official aid program to be directed at those countries in greatest need.^{viii}

Recommendation 3

That the White Paper identify three key pillars for a successful Australian foreign policy - diplomacy, defence and international aid and development.

Australia's 2015 national security strategy makes clear that effective diplomacy, defence and international development are vital if Australia is to successfully adapt to the significant international challenges of the next decade. This is consistent with the 2015 UK national security strategy, which also highlights defence, international development and diplomacy as key pillars for the UK to project its influence globally.^{ix}

Given that Australia's current national security strategy identifies international development as a key element in ensuring Australia's long term security, it would be prudent for the emerging foreign policy architecture to include this component as a key pillar. As Australian security and defence analysts recognise, any measures which improve the fabric of governance, rule of law, economic prosperity, security, equal opportunity for women and girls, resilience to disasters and stability in Australia's region are of pivotal importance as part of Australian foreign policy setting.

If international aid and development becomes one of the three pillars of Australian foreign policy, the outcome of programs across those three pillars is likely to achieve greater sustained impact. Moreover, the potential for increasing Australia's overall influence regionally and globally will be enhanced by such a strategic framework.

Australia has the potential to achieve greater diplomatic impact into the future if the design and planning of programs across the agencies involved in the pursuing these three pillars is more coherent.

ⁱ Speech at Flinders University, 11 July 2006

ⁱⁱ National day of thanksgiving address, 29 May 2004

ⁱⁱⁱ John Howard: Australian values speech 22 November 2000

^{iv} Hannah Wurf and Tristram Sainsbury "Making the most of the G20" *The Lowy Institute Analysis* July 2016. Available at: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/making-most-g20>

^v Roger C. Riddell "Does Foreign Aid Really Work?" Background paper to keynote address to the Australasian Aid and International Development Workshop, Canberra February 2014. Available at: <http://devpolicy.org/2014-Australasian-Aid-and-International-Development-Policy-Workshop/Roger-Riddell-Background-Paper.pdf> p 6

^{vi} See AusAID Annual Performance Reports: Canberra: AusAID (various years) http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pubout.cfm?ID=2449_4722_245_1463_2026 Cited in Roger C. Riddell "Does Foreign Aid Really Work?" Background paper to keynote address to the Australasian Aid and International Development Workshop, Canberra February 2014. Available at: <http://devpolicy.org/2014-Australasian-Aid-and-International-Development-Policy-Workshop/Roger-Riddell-Background-Paper.pdf> p 6

^{vii} <http://dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/investment-priorities/building-resilience/humanitarian-preparedness-and-response/Pages/humanitarian-preparedness-and-response.aspx>

^{viii} Wood, T. (2015). Australian Attitudes to Aid: Who Supports Aid, How Much Aid Do They Want Given, and What Do They Want it Given for? Development Policy Centre Discussion Paper, 2015(44).

^{ix} UK National security and strategic defence and security review (p 47)