

SUBMISSION TO
Foreign Policy White Paper Task Force
DESIRED FOREIGN POLICY

Submitted by

Josephite Justice Office
Congregations of the Sisters of St Joseph
9 Mount St North Sydney NSW 2060
and

Social Justice Committee
Congregational Leaders of Religious Institutes NSW (CLRINSW)
5/2 Alison Rd, Croydon Park NSW 2133

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Contact

Jan Barnett rsj
jan.barnett@sosj.org.au
Phone 0403 634 534

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INTRODUCTION

This submission is presented on behalf of the Josephite Justice Office, a ministry of the Congregations of the Sisters of St Joseph, and the Social Justice Committee of the Congregational leaders of Religious Institutes of NSW. We represent approximately 3,600 Catholic Religious women and men and their associates. We have a long history of working with people pushed to the edges of society and suffering from poverty and social disadvantage. Our members educate, advocate and work for justice, for earth and people, especially those pushed to the margins.

Our submission to the Foreign Policy Task Force is presented out of concern for those who are affected by our foreign policy, both in Australia and internationally. Our legitimacy as a nation and as a responsible global citizen is demonstrated in the way we articulate and embody our foreign policy, especially in our treatment of those who are the poorest and most vulnerable. It is on their behalf that we present this analysis.

PURPOSE OF CONSULTATION

The Government has identified the purpose of this consultation process as being to develop a policy that:

- pursues international engagement to make Australia and Australians more prosperous and more secure.
- Is a comprehensive strategy to guide our international engagement over the next 10 years.
- provides a roadmap for advancing and protecting Australia's interests in a dynamic, complex and unpredictable international environment.
- Is grounded in our values
- ensures Australia is better positioned to seize opportunities and manage risks.

As women and men religious, we consider that the integrity of our foreign policy must be firmly grounded in the best of which our nation is capable. We believe that the stated purpose of this consultation falls short of this. Its emphasis on national and economic interests appears to undermine our responsibilities as a global citizen. It is our conviction that an ethical and authentic foreign policy calls for much more than making 'Australia more prosperous and more secure', which seems to be the thrust of the terms of reference.

Consequently, this submission will focus on:

1. The values which must underpin a foreign policy if it is to embody our rights and responsibilities as a model global citizen;
2. Those issues which are currently placing the economy, the environment, the global community and the safety of future generations at severe risk;

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES UNDERPINNING A PRINCIPLED AND RESPONSIBLE FOREIGN POLICY

It is our strong belief that a principled foreign policy will have as its focus, not only the good of Australia, but concomitantly, the good of the global community. The values underpinning our foreign policy should be fairness and justice, democracy and the rule of law, compassion and generosity. For these reasons, we hold the following principles to be inviolable.

- Responsibility for the global common good rests with all nations.
- Australia and Australians have a responsibility to be responsible global citizens, acting in the interests, both of our own nation, and of peoples and nations who do not share our prosperity and security.
- Recognition of the inherent dignity and equal rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.
- The promotion of fair and ethical trade, underpinned by fair trade agreements, supports both the global and Australian economy
- Empowerment of women and indigenous peoples is central to equality of opportunity.
- As a signatory to the UN Conventions, Australia has undertaken to abide by the standards set by these Conventions, to allow its citizens access to U.N. bodies and to accept from such bodies constructive criticism of our human rights practice.

- Australia cannot achieve its security and prosperity alone. These are achieved primarily by the quality of our relationships with other nations.
- Everything and everyone is connected.

BASIC ISSUES AFFECTING FOREIGN POLICY

The global concerns that call for a strong Australian foreign policy are:

- Foreign aid as our response to poverty and inequality,
- Climate change,
- Australia's relations with the United Nation
- Global alliances as ways secure a just, peaceful world order.

FOREIGN AID & DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Foreign aid is one of the most significant and most transparent ways that Australia demonstrates its commitment as a responsible member of the global community. The marked decrease in Australian aid in recent years demonstrates our diminishing sense of responsibility to the millions of people suffering in situations of poverty, oppression and injustice.

Issues

- Our consumer goods and services come more and more from other countries, often developing nations, where wages and working conditions are far below those in Australia.
- Consumerism and over-consumption rob the poor of their basic necessities.
- Economic inequality is one of the most pressing issues of our world
- Despite being one of the wealthiest nations in the world, successive cuts to Australian aid means that Australia is on track to its lowest ever level of aid spending. Between 2012 and 2016, Australia's foreign aid as a share of national income fell steeply from 0.36% to 0.23%. This is approximately 23 cents in every \$100 of our national income (Commonwealth Statistical Summary 2016). This is the lowest ever

level of Australian aid in its 60-year history, and leaves Australia lagging behind many other developed nations, including the UK, which has lifted its aid spending to 70 cents in every \$100.

- It is impossible, on these figures, for Australia to contribute in any significant way to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Possible strategies for Australia's foreign policy in the area of aid

- Honour the U.N. target of spending 0.7% (GNI) on international aid
- Acknowledge that the achievement of the SDGs needs to be an underpinning aim of our aid commitment
- Assist in building a sustainable global community founded on interdependence and the principles of human rights
- Focus on poverty alleviation and sustainable development in recipient countries
- Champion gender equality, disability inclusion, and an end to discrimination.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Issues

According to the Australian Climate Council, 2016 was the hottest year on record globally for the third year in a row. The planet has already passed safe levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, disproportionately affecting those who are poor and most vulnerable, especially those in the Pacific region. Both domestic and foreign policy continue to affect the future of the planet.

- Extreme weather events, increasing temperatures, floods and droughts have serious social, economic and health consequences, including increasing displacement of populations
- Australia currently has an economy that depends on an *over-consumption* of energy. We have the world's highest average emissions per person.
- Australia has endorsed the Paris Agreement (COP21), but has made only limited financial commitments to adaptation and mitigation efforts. Australia is at the bottom

of the rankings of countries contributing to the fight against climate change (Develop Policy Centre)

- Despite the Paris Agreement, the Australian Government continues to support (through contracts, financial subsidies, and legislation), the coal, gas mineral industries, even suggesting that the moratorium on coal-powered stations be lifted. Currently, the Government gives annually over \$7.7 billion to support the production and consumption of fossil fuels
- As the Adani mine seems set to proceed, the Great Barrier Reef is suffering the worst coral-bleaching event in its history.

Possible strategies for strengthening Australia's foreign policy in those areas related to climate change

The loss of manufacturing jobs, an ageing fossil fuel infrastructure, juxtaposed by a favourable climate, places Australia in an ideal situation to move decisively towards a low-carbon, climate resilient transformation of the Australian environment and the economy. For the sake of future generations and survival of earth, we believe it to be critically important

- to minimise our footprint on the earth
- to place a moratorium on coal mining
- to promote renewable energy as the preferred way of moving forward
- to provide training in renewable industries to build employment opportunities.

By demanding a stronger stance on climate, Australia can secure a better, safer future, fulfil its responsibilities in the region, and assert itself as a world leader.

AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONS WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Issues

1. Australia has permanent maritime boundaries with most nations in its region: New Zealand, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. There is no border however between Timor-Leste and Australia. Each nation has the right to its own sovereignty. Each nation needs to know what resources in the Timor Sea it owns. Sharing the resources fairly needs a fair and permanent border. Timor Leste is advocating for a border which is fair and which recognises the rights and responsibilities of both Australia and Timor Leste.

2. The people of West Papua are threatened with becoming a small minority in their own land and currently live with unrelenting intimidation and brutality at the hands of the Indonesian government. Their treatment mirrors that suffered by the people of Timor Leste prior to that country's independence.
3. Climate change, as outlined above, poses particularly severe and urgent threats to the health, well-being and security of our Pacific neighbours who are the poorest and most vulnerable in our region.

Possible strategies

Australia can be a better regional neighbour in very specific ways at this time:

- agreeing to fair boundaries with Timor Leste
- advocating with Indonesia to stop the violence in west Papua
- supporting self-determination for West Papua
- helping our pacific neighbours adapt to climate change by
 - banning new coal and gas
 - reducing climate pollution
 - developing climate related technology
 - increasing our contribution to the Green Climate fund

RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

Issues

- Australia has been found in breach of obligations under Conventions on Indigenous Rights, Civil and Political Rights, Status of Refugees and Rights of the Child.
- Downgrading our respect for UN goals and standards has damaged Australia's reputation in the international community and raised questions at home and abroad about our commitment to human rights.

- The Australian Government's attitude to the UN has been characterised by rejection of constructive criticism, cooperation only 'as we see fit' and seeing UN monitoring of human rights practice not as a service but as 'interference' in domestic affairs.

Possible Strategies to improve our relations with the U.N.

- Re-establish a positive, cooperative relationship with the UNO and its international systems.
- Acknowledge the injustices in policy and practice, which are the subject of UN criticism and take decisive action to remove them.

GLOBAL ALLIANCES TO SECURE A JUST, PEACEFUL WORLD ORDER

Issues

- Our alliances are important to our security, and the alliance with the U.S. is an important element of Australia's international security arrangements, nonetheless any proposed intervention requires our own thorough assessment of the morality of the situation and broad international approval.
- Australia has sought bilateral trade or defence agreements, rather than taking up the challenge of building global networks to secure a just, peaceful world order.
- Public discussion about the deployment of Australian troops in Afghanistan and Iraq has largely been confined to an assessment of the consequences of the war. War cannot be judged only by its consequences.

Possible Strategies to strengthen our alliances and interventions

- Recognise that the best long term solution to instability beyond Australian borders is increased aid spending, a focus on peace and security, welcoming more people seeking asylum, increasing peace-keeping forces
- Work at building multilateral rather than bilateral relationships, regionally and globally, as a step towards eliminating armed conflict, abuse of human rights and destruction of the environment.
- make an ethical assessment of any proposed involvement, rather than simply acquiescing in another country's intervention.

CONCLUSION

We find ourselves at a critical turning point in our global history. The challenges we face provide us with new possibilities for developing a foreign policy that can demonstrate clearly our commitment to the global community. This commitment will be seen in the way we respond to issues such as poverty, climate change, conflict, violence and war facing us.

There is no way, in this new world, that we can focus on making 'Australia more prosperous and more secure' without recognising the interconnectedness of the whole global community. We know that there is an inseparable relationship between poverty and the fragility of the planet, between our relations with the U.N. and in the global alliances we establish to secure a just, peaceful world order.

The best legacy our Government can leave those who come after us includes justice and equality, a healthy planet, and world peace. We believe that these are the foundations of our shared humanity, foundations that will enable us to work together to secure the long-term security, prosperity and happiness of future generations, both in Australia and across our planet.