



## **The role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict**

### **Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT)**

#### **Nonviolent Peaceforce**

We exist in an interconnected world, and the complex challenges – conflict, violence, climate change, inequality - impact Australians directly. It is critical that Australia engage proactively in co-creating peaceful, stable global conditions.

There is an urgency to this task, and this inquiry is timely. The latest [Global Peace Index](#) from Sydney-based Global Institute for Economics and Peace tells a frightening story: there are currently 59 active state-based conflicts, the most since the end of WWII; less conflicts are being resolved than at any point in the last 50 years; and a decades-long trend away from militarisation has reversed. The [latest data from ACLED](#) on deaths in conflict is similarly concerning, with 240,000 fatalities related to conflict recorded between July 2024 and June 2025, a 23% increase year-on-year.

Underneath these statistics is a growing trend toward fragility and violence that manifests not only in death, but in [grievous physical injuries](#) and [trauma](#), and loss of rights and access to [health](#) and [education](#). These impacts are not confined to sites of conflict alone, but have regional and global implications for safety, stability and security. It is essential that states, including Australia, are institutionally equipped to meet these needs and integrate conflict prevention across the aid program.

#### **Strategic prevention**

When conflict is prevented, when people are safe and able to live their daily lives without fear, it is often a quiet victory. Avoided wars, the continuation of everyday life, the harm that is prevented – these outcomes do not make headlines.

Despite this, there is a wealth of evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of violence prevention and peacebuilding programs – from [local organisations](#), to [program evaluations](#) from a broad range of contexts, to [academic literature](#). The case examples provided below demonstrate how existing programs (funded by Australia and other allied donors) have contributed to the prevention of violence and sustainable peace.

Investments in prevention of conflict – an essential, strategic, and efficient use of resources – risk suffering as victims of success. At the same time, the value is quantifiable: Global conflict has high economic costs–estimated at [\\$19.97 trillion in 2024](#) by the Institute for Economics and Peace. Set against such significant costs, investment in early identification and mitigation of conflict is a smart long-term investment. A recent study by the International Monetary Fund found that every \$1 spent on conflict prevention [saves up to \\$103](#) in potential costs for humanitarian and securitized interventions.

### **Prevention in practice**

Australia has funded programs that have effectively prevented conflict escalation and that have embodied these goals in the past, including through partnership with Nonviolent Peaceforce. The best way to understand this contribution is through specific examples, and through the lives of those directly impacted by conflict. As such, we share below three case examples from the region that give an insight into the value of conflict prevention commitment from those most impacted.

#### **Example 1: BRACE Project (Building the Resilience of women, young people, at-risk groups and their Communities Against violent Extremism), supported by Australia in the Philippines**

The overall goal of the collaboration between NP and Australia in the Philippines has been to promote peace and stability in the self-governing Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) following the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in 2014. NP's interventions have increased the participation, capacity, and resilience of women, youth, and vulnerable groups in addressing radicalization, violent extremism, and gender-based and other forms of violence.

From 2021 to 2025, the Australian Government funded projects in the BARMM and adjacent provinces with a presence of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). These projects focused on building social cohesion and preventing violence. These initiatives also worked to ensure women's engagement in local peacebuilding, community-based conflict transformation, and peace advocacy, as well as by facilitating their participation in electoral and democratic processes.

NP and its partners have emphasised strengthening systems that enable communities to anticipate and respond to emerging violent threats before they escalate. Central to this approach has been the development of early warning and early response (EWER) mechanisms with communities. These mechanisms aim to prevent violence by tracking



indicators of potential violence, and when warning signs arise, implementing proactive strategies to interrupt violence and reduce potential harm to civilians. With support from the Australian Government, NP harmonized early warning systems across government bodies, linked them to ceasefire mechanisms, and strengthened capacity to address the participation and protection needs of marginalised groups including women and youth. Through this integration, EWER has become a critical tool for fostering peaceful coexistence and building resilience in vulnerable communities.

In the BARMM, the EWER system developed by NP illustrates how violence prevention mechanisms can evolve over the course of a conflict. Initially established to monitor the ceasefire between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF, EWER teams emerged to fill critical protection gaps left by formal security actors. With NP's support, community-based monitors, many of them women and youth, were trained to identify and report violations, de-escalate tensions, and provide protective presence for displaced populations. Drawing on their trusted community relationships, these monitors later expanded their role to address election-related violence. What began as a ceasefire monitoring tool evolved into an institutionalized civic mechanism for violence prevention and democratic participation.

This proactive approach has helped prevent the escalation of conflict while enabling timely and coordinated responses to climate-related and conflict-induced crises. Its effectiveness was demonstrated through the logging and coordination of responses to more than 85 incidents of election-related violence.

Finally, the support of the Australian government allowed NP to extend psychosocial wellbeing support to former combatants and their family members. Case management and psychosocial healing sessions reached 100 former combatants, and more than 130 of their family members. This was critical to increasing these individuals' abilities to counter radicalization, heal, and reintegrate into civilian life.

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### **Example 3: Creating conditions for peace, protection of women, social cohesion and re-integration in Indonesia**

NP has supported the groundbreaking peace agreement that ended nearly three decades of armed conflict in Aceh by strengthening local efforts to advance transitional justice, protect women's rights, and promote civic engagement. This resulted in the collection of more than 1,200 victim-statements as part of an inclusive healing process, and monetary compensation being given to 245 victims. By creating a safer space for victims to voice their experiences of injustice in relationship to others, and by proactively engaging with those in power to address injustice and insecurity, NP and partners made a contribution to the healing of a long-standing cycle of violence in Aceh and to the growth of a culture of nonviolence.

Twenty years after the agreement, civil society partners are still working for peace and security but confront systemic violence against women. Following engagement with different stakeholders at the local, regional, and national levels in 2023 and 2024, NP's role as a connector allowed women's groups to gain access to religious leaders and eventually led to the central government leading a policy draft of revisions to the *Qanun Jinayat*, the Islamic Criminal Code practiced in Aceh. This is a significant and positive development in securing increased protections against sexual and gender-based violence.

At present, NP's work in Indonesia focuses on violence prevention and the social reintegration of former combatants into civilian life. Through its interventions in Bima and Poso, highly vulnerable areas with a long history as a base for extremist networks, NP has reached nearly 1,000 community members through community-based activities, and engaged 111 individuals exposed to extreme and divisive ideologies, including high-risk former detainees and their family members. Importantly, these individuals had previously refused any engagement with the state but now participate in state-linked and community activities.

EWER has also played a role in NP's interventions in Indonesia. Since 2023, NP has worked with the Ministry of Religious Affairs to train more than 150 religious counsellors in EWER,

enabling them to act as community-level first responders and support reintegration using non-security, trust-based approaches down to the village level.

## **Recommendations**

Australia's aid program has a proven, strategic role to play in preventing conflict and building sustainable peace. At a time of unprecedented global violence and fragility, conflict prevention is not optional or peripheral to Australia's interests; it is essential to regional stability, human security, and Australia's own long-term safety. The evidence is clear that conflict is becoming more frequent, more protracted, and more costly in human suffering and economic impact. Conflict prevention is therefore one of the most effective and responsible priorities that governments can resource.

Conflict prevention work is often invisible precisely because it succeeds: violence does not escalate, civilians remain safe, democratic processes continue, and communities retain the capacity to manage tensions peacefully. The case studies from the Philippines, Myanmar and Indonesia illustrate how investments have helped communities anticipate and de-escalate violence, protect civilians, strengthen women's leadership, support democratic participation, and enable the reintegration of former combatants. These outcomes are not abstract—they are measurable, life-saving, and enduring. They also demonstrate the comparative advantage of community-led, nonviolent approaches.

The examples further show that prevention is most effective when it is long-term, locally grounded, inclusive of women and youth, and embedded in systems such as early warning and early response mechanisms. These approaches build institutional and social resilience that endures beyond individual projects and remains effective even when formal peace processes stall or political conditions deteriorate. Modest investments in prevention avert far greater future costs in humanitarian response and regional insecurity.

## **Recommendations for the Australian Government**

1. **Increase and protect dedicated funding for conflict prevention and peacebuilding** within the aid program, recognising it as a core strategic investment that needs to be prioritised and integrated, rather than a discretionary or short-term activity.

2. **Integrate conflict prevention across the aid program**, ensuring that sectoral investments (including climate, governance, gender equality and humanitarian assistance) systematically integrate conflict sensitivity, early warning, and violence prevention approaches.
3. **Commit to long-term partnerships with trusted civil society partners**, enabling continuity, community trust, and sustained impact rather than short funding cycles that undermine prevention outcomes.
4. **Strengthen support for community-based early warning and early response systems**, particularly those that connect communities with local and national institutions and ensure the meaningful participation and protection of women, youth and other marginalised groups.
5. **Elevate unarmed civilian protection and nonviolent approaches** as essential tools alongside diplomatic and security efforts, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts where militarised responses can exacerbate harm.
6. **Invest in learning, evidence and evaluation of prevention outcomes**, to better capture avoided violence, cost savings, and long-term resilience, ensuring prevention work is visible, credible and accountable.

By increasing support for conflict prevention, Australia can help avert violence before it escalates, reduce future humanitarian and security burdens, and contribute to a more peaceful and stable region.