To the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Inquiry into the Role of Australia's International Development Program in Preventing Conflict

Submission from:
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Executive Summary.
The most effective and enduring international development program, including substituting co-operation between nations for aiding militarisation, will:

1. **Ensure women are engaged and empowered within Australia's international development program:**

My research and experience in the international development field have largely been through a gendered lens, revealing the key roles women play in strengthening communities, mobilising resources for the benefit of their families and seeking peaceful and negotiated resolution of disputes and conflict. All societies are marked by unequal gender relations, and Australia's programs and support for participants must undertake to counter those structures so that the key actors for peace and social cohesion - men, women or non-gender-binary - have the resources and skills to achieve peace- and equity-oriented goals.

2. **Maximise effectiveness and social cohesion through 'peer-to-peer' delivery, that is partnerships between citizens and organisations with similar functions and goals in Australia and recipient nations**

Government to government aid tends to focus on building large-scale infrastructure 'monuments' rather than strengthening human resources, supporting maintenance and repair, and ensuring that recipient communities are involved in deciding how development funds will be spent. 'Peer-to-peer' engagement strengthens interpersonal and social connections between members of Australian society and partner organisations in recipient countries. Government to government aid is often wasteful as funds are lost through misappropriation and political intervention creates misallocation.

3. **The underlying conditions for peace and democracy are physical and emotional security, equal participation in decision-making at all levels from community to nation and social and political structures supporting equity and reducing inequality.**

Instead of arming soldiers with military hardware and building military infrastructure targets in our neighbouring nations, international development should enhance the conditions that reduce the likelihood of conflict: security through health and education; greater political and economic equality; enabling human rights and democratic participation; ensuring free and independent media and communications; supporting climate adaptation and mitigation solutions controlled at the local level wherever possible.

Background/Interest
My books *Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Post-Colonial World*, *Australian Women in Papua New Guinea: Colonial Passages 1920-1960* and *One World Women's Movement* explored how women understand and misunderstand each other across different values, history and social structures. My research included how women related internationally through development and foreign aid programs.

I have taught at Beijing Foreign Studies University and Tokyo University. I have been invited to give guest lectures in Thailand, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan. My faculties at Griffith University and the University of Adelaide hosted visiting academics from China, Vietnam and Thailand. In 1997, I participated in the DEETYA-funded project 'Development of Strategic Plan for Australian Studies in Korea', as well as more exploratory programs for developing Australian Studies in Thailand and Vietnam. These international experiences brought me into contact with several well-placed academics whose favourable impression of Australia and desire to collaborate with Australia arose from their participation in the Colombo Plan or educational or organisational 'peer-to-peer' experiences in Australia. These programs built international social capital at comparatively insignificant cost, strengthening ties between institutions in Australia and our neighbouring countries.

From 2009 to 2015, I was the co-secretary of the Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan-WA, during which time we directly raised over $12,000 in funds, largely through securing a grant from GlobalQuest, and also by hosting fund-raising events featuring Afghan speakers. I also gave talks to community groups on the situation of women in Afghanistan. SAWA supported a vocational training centre in Kabul which taught sewing and computing skills to women and girls. This was not unusual, but the additional curriculum course in Afghan women's human rights was an unusual but important commitment to empowering women for psychological independence and political action as well as greater economic security.

In 2010, the Australian Greens were added to the Australian Political Parties for Democracy Program (APPDP) established by the Federal Government in 2005 to fund political parties to further the development of political party systems in partner countries. This funding underwrote increased collaboration with Greens parties in In the Asia Pacific region, such as East Timor, Indonesia and Nepal. The collaboration assisted Greens parties and organisations to improve their capacity to participate in their democratic political processes at all levels of government, many for the first time (https://greens.org.au/international/appdp). One example was ex-MLC for WA, Giz Watson's visit to the Nepali Greens to participate in a "Green Camp: a grassroots community based 3 days' workshop" and to assist in election readiness for the national elections. Giz Watson was impressed with the Nepali Greens' commitment to supporting greens candidates in remote locations, but identified challenges, including the difficulty of progressive political engagement for villagers whose basic needs for food and shelter are not met (Giz Watson, *Green Issue*, Dec, 2017, p21-24). Following these projects, interested members in Greens parties in Australia formed 'friendship' groups to continue collaboration with Greens political party members in Asia Pacific countries. These two-way conversations mean Australian Greens build stronger connections and greater understanding with our neighbours.

Response to Terms of Reference (ToR)

Term of Reference 1: 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.

☐ My experience and knowledge of the Australian government's programs for expanding Australian Studies in universities in Asia and the Australian Political Parties for Democracy Program (APPDP) demonstrates the enduring value of peer-to-peer engagement at the grassroots level, both in strengthening community and civic participation, understanding of and engagement in democracy in the recipient country and in building enduring ties of friendship and trust between Australians and citizens in other countries.

☐ That said, Australia's support for governance in other countries must be non-coercive, focusing on empowering and enabling citizens to participate, building transparency and accountability. Australians participating in these programs should avoid proselytising Western political models as the only or best form of governance. Australian participants must come with cross-cultural understanding and openness to learning and collaboration

☐ Long-term investment in human capital, specifically in health and education, is foundational to reducing inequality and building secure, peaceful and resilient societies. This investment will deliver communities more resistant to internal conflict and with more positive ties to Australia than a focus on 'security reform' which risks militarising aid.

Recommendations:

☐ Prioritise direct and flexible funding at the local level and to community organisations such as local CSOs, human rights defenders, women's peace networks, and grassroots political organisations working to strengthen democracy. Bypass centralised government structures as much as possible.
☐ Support local anti-corruption bodies and independent media to strengthen democratic oversight and reduce the drivers of internal conflict.
☐ Cease funding for military-to-military training programs under the Official Development Assistance (ODA) banner. Instead, focus exclusively on demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programs, and support community-based justice and reconciliation mechanisms.
☐ Dedicate a substantial and protected portion of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) to universal health and education programs.

Term of Reference 2: The strategic use of Australia's international development program to prevent conflict in the Indo-Pacific.

☐ The environmental impact of militarisation is substantial, with global military activities accounting for 5.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Recommendations:

☐ The major concerns expressed by nations in the Indo-Pacific to the Australian government revolve around the climate crisis. This is driving resource scarcity, displacement, and political instability. Australia's aid delivery should focus on assisting climate mitigation and adaptation in these nations, framed as a core conflict prevention measure. This includes substituting energy sourced from fossil fuels with community controlled renewable energy, such as solar panels, windmills and batteries; working with impacted communities to achieve restoration of their natural environment and food resources, such as reefs and forests, developing regenerative agriculture programs and developing and protecting clean water sources.

Term of Reference 3: Options for effective support through Australia's aid program in pre-conflict and/or post-conflict zones.

☐ Women are disproportionately affected by conflict but are also the most effective agents of peace.
☐ Research indicates that women on average are more supportive of peace than are men. They should be empowered to participate as equal actors in securing non-violent solutions and defending peace.

Recommendations:

☐ To engage women equally in peace programs, international development programs must provide training and other resources to enable women to act as negotiators, mediators, responders and in other roles that deflect violence and secure resolution after conflict.
☐ Program delivery must also be prepared to deal with community resistance to empowering women and develop education and other strategies to reduce any backlash.

Term of Reference 4: The impact of international development in the maintenance of peace and prevention of conflict, including for early identification and mitigation of conflict.

☐ When development is implemented through a 'peace-lens', it will serve to reduce the likelihood of conflict.

Recommendations:
☐ Australia must significantly increase funding for programs that implement the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, focusing on women's political participation, economic empowerment, and protection from gender-based violence.
☐ International development programs should seek to partner with grassroots community-embedded organisations, building reciprocity through peer-to-peer connections with Australians, ensuring women are at least equally involved in building community resilience and averting and resolving conflict and that they are resourced for those leadership roles.

Conclusion

In dollar terms, in longevity terms and in strengthening connections within communities and between Australia and our neighbours, the best way to reduce conflict and other social ills is aid programs developed in partnership with local communities that strengthens international understanding and democratic engagement in Australia and abroad.

Societies are more likely to achieve long-term success in averting conflict, avoiding social division and building resilient communities where their members are empowered to participate as informed citizens, feel respected and valued in their communities, where social and economic structures strain towards greater equality in resources, power and influence for their citizens, and where political and other leaders are committed to averting climate catastrophe, armed conflict and communities divided by hatred and ignorance. This is as true in Australia as it is among our international neighbours.