Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN PREVENTING CONFLICT

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INTRODUCTION

The world is facing rising instability, with more armed conflicts underway than at any time since the end of World War II. Protracted violence, climate-driven shocks, widening economic inequality, technological disruption, and the erosion of international rules and norms are imposing severe human, economic and environmental costs.

Preventing conflict before it escalates is essential. Early action saves lives, avoids major economic losses and development setbacks, and reduces the risk that local tensions become entangled in wider geopolitical competition. Vulnerable states are particularly susceptible to coercion and external interference when internal pressures grow unchecked.

Australia's interests are directly affected by these global dynamics. Conflict generates spillover impacts such as refugee outflows, irregular migration, human trafficking, trade disruption, disease outbreaks, terrorism and violent extremism — all of which affect Australia's security, economy and social cohesion. As strategic competition intensifies and climate and economic pressures mount, preventing conflict is critical to reducing the likelihood of crises, costly interventions and avertible human suffering.

Australia's security and prosperity are inextricably linked to the stability of the Indo-Pacific. Conflict at the intrastate, regional or geostrategic level can rapidly escalate and spill across borders, undermining regional resilience and affecting Australia directly.

Australia's development program helps reduce conflict risks across three interconnected levels:

- Intrastate and subnational: reducing fragility, addressing grievances, supporting inclusive development, and strengthening locally led mediation and peacebuilding.
- Intraregional: managing tensions, building trust, and reinforcing regional cooperation and architecture.
- Geostrategic: supporting multilateral norms, regional institutions and international law to bolster sovereignty and maintain a favourable strategic balance.

In each of these domains, conflict prevention is a strategic imperative. By reducing the drivers of instability and strengthening state and societal resilience, Australia helps create conditions that support regional peace, protect Australian interests and reduce exposure to costly crises.

Australia's international development program is a core tool of statecraft — an investment in shaping our strategic environment for the better. By strengthening governance, improving economic outcomes, reducing inequalities, supporting mediation, and mitigating conflict spillover risks, the development program plays a central role in sustaining peace and building resilience across the region.

Evidence consistently shows that early, inclusive development investments are among the most cost-effective ways to prevent conflict escalation and avoid far greater humanitarian and financial costs later[1]. Through both Official Development Assistance (ODA) and complementary non-ODA investments[2], Australia addresses the root causes of conflict and helps lay the foundations for stability and prosperity.

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[1] UNDP and World Bank, Pathways for Peace - Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict | United Nations Development Programme, 2018

[2] ODA flows are defined as grants and loans administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as the main objective and are concessional in character. For more on ODA see: Glossary | AusDevPortal

Australia's experience in Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach. Long-term development assistance — coupled with policing and defence cooperation — was critical to peace processes, post-conflict recovery and the enduring stability we see today. The same integrated approach now underpins Australia's work in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Mindanao in the Philippines, and PNG's Highlands, ensuring coherence across development, diplomatic, defence and security efforts.

Australia has also repositioned the development program to meet current global pressures. In 2025–26, three-quarters of Australia's ODA is expected to benefit the Indo-Pacific — the highest share in four decades. This reflects a deliberate strategy to strengthen regional resilience where it matters most for Australia's interests.

To maximise impact, Australia is harnessing whole-of-nation partnerships — supporting critical infrastructure, labour mobility, digital connectivity and banking access. These combined ODA and non-ODA initiatives multiply the impact of development assistance and reinforce a region that favours peace, preserves sovereignty and sustains prosperity.

Terms of Reference

The Inquiry will consider the role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict, with particular reference to:

- 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
- the strategic use of Australia's international development program to prevent conflict in the Indo-Pacific
- options for effective support through Australia's aid program in pre-conflict and/or post-conflict zones
- the impact of international development in the maintenance of peace and prevention of conflict, including for early identification and mitigation of conflict, and
- any related matters.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) Inquiry into the role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict.

This submission outlines how Australia's international development program is supporting a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. It highlights the integral role our development program plays in underpinning and complementing Australia's diplomatic, defence and wider security efforts to reduce the risk of conflict in our region, and beyond. It identifies options to further enhance and embed our international development program's contribution to conflict prevention. It also complements DFAT's submission to the JSCFADT Inquiry into gender equality as a national security and economic security imperative.

CONTEXT AND EVIDENCE

The global system is under acute and compounding strain. Rising strategic competition, more severe and frequent climate impacts, and rapid technological shifts — including advances in AI and digital technologies — are accelerating cyber threats, disinformation, and foreign interference. The number of armed conflicts has nearly doubled in the past five years, and in 2025 one in six people worldwide was living in proximity to conflict[3]. At the same time, humanitarian need and global displacement have reached record highs, driving demand for assistance just as global ODA levels are entering sharp decline.

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[3] Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, Conflict Index, 2025.

Efforts to manage tensions peacefully are increasingly undermined by the erosion of long-standing international rules and norms that uphold sovereignty, human rights and respect for international law. Together, these trends are reshaping global strategic risk and heightening fragility — particularly in states where institutions are weak, governance is contested, and inequality is entrenched.

The Economic and Human Cost is High

There are strong links between conflict and economic collapse.[4] Conflict typically triggers an immediate 15 per cent decline in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita on average. If conflict is prolonged for a decade or more, economies on average remain 28 per cent below pre-conflict GDP per capita levels.[5] Many states fall into a 'conflict trap', where low economic growth perpetuates renewed violence. Extreme poverty rates in fragile and conflict-affected economies hover near 40 per cent, compared to 6 per cent in other emerging market and developing economies.[6] These effects can spillover into neighbouring countries, and the global economy through refugee outflows, labour loss, trade disruptions and health crises.

Preventing such crises through early investment in resilience and inclusive development is far more cost-effective than post-conflict humanitarian response and reconstruction, which requires prolonged engagement and vastly more financial, political and human resources. Evidence consistently shows that investing early in inclusive development and resilience reduces the need for costly crisis response, military intervention and reconstruction support[7]. International Monetary Fund analysis suggests that every dollar invested in development activities that spur economic growth and political stability, can avert spending of between US$26-$103 in possible future conflict-related costs.[8]

> **Myanmar**
> The crisis in Myanmar since the 2021 military coup has had severe economic costs, reversing the development gains of the previous decade. The economy has contracted sharply, shrinking by approximately 9 per cent between 2020 and 2024, and remains around 20 per cent smaller than it was before the coup.[9] Inflation however has surged, peaking at 35 per cent in 2022 and averaging 28 per cent in 2023-2024, while the kyat depreciated from 1,330 per USD in 2021 to over 4,000 in 2025 (unofficial rate), eroding purchasing power. Regime-imposed trade restrictions, border closures, and insecurity mean it is difficult to import goods and what comes into the country is unaffordable for most people, while foreign investment has collapsed. Nearly half the population now lives below the poverty line, compared to 24 per cent before the coup. A quarter of the population is food insecure, and 16.2 million people require humanitarian assistance, with 3.6 million internally displaced, according to the UN 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan.[10] The structural damage to trade networks, fiscal stability, and human capital will take decades to repair and will impede the country's growth for years to come. Myanmar's trajectory illustrates the economic imperatives of conflict prevention and its resolution.

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[4] ParlInfo - Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee: 31/05/2017 : Estimates: FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE PORTFOLIO

[5] IMF - The Macroeconomic Costs of Conflict, WP/20/110, June 2020. Partly driven by an average 25 per cent fall in private consumption and dramatic trade disruptions - exports and imports drop by 58 per cent and 34 per cent respectively.

[6] World Bank - Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations: Intertwined Crises, Multiple Vulnerabilities

[7] Pathways for Peace - Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict | United Nations Development Programme, 2018

[8] International Monetary Fund - The Urgency of Conflict Prevention – A Macroeconomic Perspective, WP/24/256, December 2024. The IMF found that returns to prevention policies in countries that have not suffered recently from violence range from US$26 to US$75 per US$1 spent on conflict prevention, and for countries with recent violence, the rate of return could be as high as US$103 per US$1 spent on conflict prevention.

[9] The World Bank – Myanmar Economic Monitor, December 2024.

[10] UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026,

In contemplating the costs of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, it is worth considering the heavy economic toll of armed conflict. While RAMSI is estimated to have cost Australia $2.8 billion (2003-2017) – more when coupled with ODA-spend – the cost of a failed state on Australia's doorstep would have been far greater.[11]

Beyond its heavy economic toll, conflict's destructive impacts are wide-ranging across human, social, political, infrastructure and environmental spheres. The human cost extends beyond deaths and injuries (with an estimated 160 million people living with some form of disability attributable to conflict[12]), to mass population displacement, livelihood losses, the shattering of social cohesion, and the setback of development for decades.

Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Human trafficking and modern slavery are symptoms and drivers of instability. They flourish where adherence to rules, governance and markets have broken down, with income and displacement shocks arising from conflict increasing vulnerability to forced labour, irregular migration, sexual exploitation, child labour, and early or forced marriage. Human trafficking and modern slavery also drive conflict and instability as they foster corruption, illicit markets, the breakdown of trust in the state and its institutions, and the erosion of social cohesion. An example is the growth of human trafficking for online scam centres – the fastest growing form of human trafficking, driven by organised crime. Increasingly, these hubs of poly-criminality undermine regional resilience and cohesion. Addressing the causes of human trafficking is a direct investment in economic and human security, a cornerstone of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

CONFLICT IS A MAJOR THREAT TO REGIONAL SECURITY AND PROSPERITY

These global dynamics are playing out acutely in the Indo-Pacific where we face a convergence of threats that interact and amplify one another – with state fragility interacting with intraregional tensions and strategic competition. The region is experiencing tariff and trade disruption, and increased transnational crime, piracy, illegal fishing and corruption. Terrorism remains a persistent challenge. Climate change impacts are compounding these pressures, acting as a threat multiplier in exacerbating resource scarcity, economic stress, and displacement. Emerging and established powers are stepping up engagement in the region and competition is intensifying across military, diplomatic, economic and information domains. As Australia's National Defence Strategy (2024) makes clear: strategic competition is now a defining feature of the regional landscape. We must draw on all elements of national power to navigate this context and build regional resilience and meet cross-border challenges.

Within the Indo-Pacific, pressures manifest differently across sub-regions. In Southeast Asia, protracted conflict in Myanmar, territorial disputes (such as the Cambodia-Thai border), trade shock reverberations, and rising food, energy and health insecurity, and the low-level but enduring threat of terrorism, have created persistent risks to regional stability. South Asia also faces heightened fragility, driven by political instability, inequality, growing debt burdens and displacement. These challenges are expected to intensify with growing population pressures, transnational crime, maritime security threats, and terrorism and violent extremism threats. In the Pacific, the compounding impacts of climate change, growing debt vulnerabilities, rising maritime security threats, uneven economic opportunity and high youth unemployment, can combine to fuel social discontent and increase the risk of unrest and instability – all with flow-on cross-border impacts for Australia if left unaddressed.

With Australia's security and prosperity inextricably tied to developments in the Indo-Pacific, preventing conflict and shaping a favourable regional balance that sustains peace is a strategic necessity. Together with other Australian Government agencies, DFAT is deploying our full range of capabilities to mitigate these risks and reduce the chance that strategic competition spirals into catastrophic conflict.

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[11] ParlInfo - Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee: 31/05/2017 : Estimates: FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE PORTFOLIO
[12] UN Mine Action Service, Persons with Disabilities in Armed Conflict | UNMAS, May 2020

OUR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IS CENTRAL TO HOW WE PREVENT CONFLICT

Development Policy Settings

Australia's development policy settings and partnership plans provide the strategic framework for how we use the development program to build resilience, prevent conflict and support peacebuilding. Conflict prevention is central to the International Development Policy (IDP, 2023), which sets the overarching objective of advancing a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. With Australia's interests most directly engaged in the region, the IDP guides the allocation of ODA and complementary non-ODA investments — including in labour mobility, digital and financial access, maritime security and infrastructure — to bolster regional resilience. It reflects global evidence that conflict prevention requires sustained investment to address its root causes, foster inclusive development, and build resilient and effective state institutions, and provide economic opportunity for all[13].

In the Indo-Pacific, Development Partnership Plans (DPPs) are the keystone of Australia's development cooperation. They articulate shared priorities, outcomes and mutual obligations between Australia and partner governments, aligning support with local needs while reinforcing sovereignty and accountability. By grounding cooperation in partner-identified priorities and providing a long-term, stable framework for engagement, DPPs seek to address the drivers of instability and ensure Australia's assistance remains responsive as risks evolve.

Australia's Humanitarian Policy (2024) complements the IDP by recognising humanitarian action as essential not only for saving lives but also for supporting early recovery, preventing conflict escalation and mitigating its spillover consequences. The policy emphasises working with capable multilateral partners — including UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) — particularly where Australia lacks a permanent in-country presence. It also underscores the importance of reinforcing international law, norms and humanitarian principles – essential to underpin sustained recovery from conflict.

Complementary thematic strategies — including Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy (2025) and International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy (2024) — ensure development efforts are inclusive. Both recognise that societies are more peaceful and resilient when development gains are broadly shared, institutions are accountable, and communities have meaningful avenues to resolve grievances. This includes assistance that promotes inclusive civic participation; strengthens human development; supports accountable institutions and access to justice; reduces inequality and social exclusion; and advances gender equality and disability inclusion.

Development assistance is a key element of Australian statecraft. When effectively targeted, it can have a multiplier effect by strengthening economic resilience, governance outcomes and strategic alignment. It complements broader diplomatic, defence and law enforcement efforts to help the region withstand coercion, recover from shocks, and maintain stability.

At the same time, development cooperation is increasingly used by others as a tool to exert influence — often without transparency or safeguards, and with limited benefit to local communities. Such approaches can expose partner governments to unsustainable debt, low-quality infrastructure, and arrangements that weaken sovereign decision-making. Australia's approach stands in contrast: we prioritise inclusive, transparent, long-term partnerships that support locally led development, including through local procurement and employment. This reinforces Australia's reputation as a trusted and reliable partner and strengthens regional confidence in our long-term commitment.

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[13] World Bank, Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations: Intertwined Crises, Multiple Vulnerabilities, 2025.

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Australia's development program operates across the full spectrum of conflict risk. Protracted conflicts are non-linear, shifting between periods of relative stability and renewed tension. Addressing conflict drivers therefore requires a deliberate, coherent and sustained approach, adaptable to evolving risks and committed over the long term. DFAT is working to maximise impact by maintaining strong bilateral, regional and multilateral partnerships, and ensuring development assistance operates alongside — and in concert with — diplomacy, defence and law enforcement, as part of an integrated national effort to support peace and resilience in the Indo-Pacific.

Bilateral Partnerships

Australia's bilateral development programs support conflict prevention and peacebuilding by strengthening capable and accountable states and institutions; reducing inequality and expanding inclusion; and enhancing resilience to external pressures and shocks. Our investments in health and education; quality infrastructure; governance and electoral reform; law and justice, including countering violent extremism; civil society and political participation; disability equity and inclusion; and women's economic empowerment and gender equality, help strengthen social cohesion, reduce grievances, and build trust between citizens and institutions. This bolsters the foundations that make societies more resilient to conflict.

Australia's bilateral support is guided by our DPPs, which reflect how we can best contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in each context. Targeted conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives can include those focused on: supporting vulnerable and marginalised communities to protect and enhance their human and natural resources so they are resilient to pressures and shocks; strengthening national institutions and civil society to help citizens and governments navigate differences peacefully and equitably; training community mediators to de-escalate tensions; and providing more formal law and justice support to strengthen institutions that have a key role in mitigating conflict and countering violent extremism. This is particularly important where inequality, limited economic opportunity, weak service delivery, and social exclusion fuel grievances. By addressing these risk factors and drivers of instability early, investments can help reduce the likelihood of conflict and violence before it escalates. Development is a first line of defence against violent conflict.

Indonesia
Australia's development partnership in Indonesia supports conflict prevention and stability by addressing root causes of tension. Our DPP promotes stability through investments in democratic participation, law and justice reform, and religious pluralism in schools. In July 2025, Australia and Indonesia jointly launched a third phase of the Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Justice Phase 3 (AIPJ3). AIPJ3 is a 5-year program valued up to $63 million to strengthen institutions, uphold the rule of law and promote stability and prosperity. AIPJ3 includes support for the development of laws, policies and strategies to prevent and address sexual violence, violent extremism, and corruption. The program will continue to foster connections across governments, civil society organisations (CSOs), universities, and the private sector.

Nepal
Australia's Subnational Governance Program in Nepal, managed by The Asia Foundation is supporting peaceful dispute resolution and strengthening locally led reforms. The Program has reached around 300,000 direct beneficiaries and is recognised as a leading example of locally led governance reform. Key achievements include:

– supported provincial laws and procedures for dispute resolution and activated intergovernmental coordination mechanisms under Nepal's federal system, including the National Coordination Council
– engaged over 600 local governments and all 7 provinces to clarify local government roles and responsibilities
– secured NPR3.3 billion (A$32 million) in revenue for subnational governments via royalty transfer reforms
– trained 2,273 community mediators (50 per cent women) and established platforms for women and marginalised groups to influence local planning.

Papua New Guinea

Since 2020, Australia has supported the UN Highlands Joint Programme (UNHJP) to provide short-term assistance (essential services and emergency response) and development activities (strengthening governance, improving infrastructure, climate adaptation and peacebuilding) to prevent and address conflict in the PNG Highlands. Through UNHJP, we are supporting local mediation groups and community facilitators to de-escalate inter-group conflict; and training health workers in community-based trauma and mental health support. Since 2023, Australia has also supported the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) deliver peacebuilding activities in the Highlands, and provide support for people displaced by conflict and affected by family/sexual violence.

The Australia-PNG Law and Justice Partnership has trained 83 local mediators to resolve disputes under the Land Dispute Settlement Act. It has also supported CSOs to run rehabilitation and job skills workshops for former warlords and youth at risk of engaging in tribal conflict. This has provided pathways away from cycles of violence, offering communities meaningful alternatives. Australia is a signatory witness to the Bougainville Peace Agreement, and has been a steadfast supporter of the Bougainville peace process. This included the 2025 moderation process which delivered the Melanesian Agreement and a framework for the peaceful determination of Bougainville's future political status.

The Philippines

Australia's support to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in the Philippines, has improved civil society participation in the resolution of community conflict. For example, CHD supported community organisation, Pakigdait, to establish the Bae Mediators Group in August 2024. This collective of 35 women peace mediators has been drawn from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, who work to resolve community conflicts and prevent them from developing into larger, more violent incidents or clan conflict. In 2025, the Bae Mediators expanded to include 5 women from the Moro National Liberation Front and were awarded First Place in the CSO Peace Award by UN Women in June 2025.

During active conflict, and where Australia may not have a bilateral presence, we predominantly provide humanitarian assistance channelled through capable and experienced partners. This enables Australia to respond rapidly and impartially to urgent needs, while mitigating operational, security and diversion risks. For example, Australia has provided $130 million since October 2023 to support civilians (predominantly women and children) in Gaza and Lebanon, with food, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health services (including sexual and reproductive health), shelter and protection support. In Ukraine, Australia's humanitarian support has helped deliver food, shelter, medical care, and psychosocial support, with a particular focus on at-risk groups, including women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Afghanistan

Our assistance aims to mitigate the extremes of humanitarian need and alleviate 'push factors' towards irregular migration, terrorism, and regional instability in one of our region's most conflict affected countries. Declining economic opportunity, unemployment, and a lack of services increase irregular migration risks and for Afghans to turn to radical or terrorist organisations for support. Australia's assistance, implemented via UN partners, supports the 2025 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, and the 2025 Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan. Our assistance prioritises basic food, water, health, shelter and protection needs, with a particular focus on women and girls. In the region (including in Iran and Pakistan) this assistance has afforded protection and access to basic services for Afghans and host communities.

Bangladesh

Following major civil unrest in 2024, Australia's development program is supporting Bangladesh to build a peaceful, inclusive and democratic future through electoral support, strengthening judicial independence, and creating a policy and regulatory environment for economic and political stability. Our DPP with Bangladesh focuses on education, gender equality, skills development, social protection and governance reform. We are also partnering with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to support the conduct of free and fair elections in February 2026. Our partnership with BRAC (Bangladesh's largest NGO) helped lift 1 million households out of extreme poverty between 2012-2024. This is complemented by non-ODA, such as Australian Border Force's work with the Bangladesh Coast Guard and the Bangladesh Police Special Branch, to strengthen capacity to identify and respond to maritime threats and irregular migration. The Australian Federal Police (AFP) is delivering training on law enforcement and countering people smuggling, and Defence is delivering training to the Bangladesh military, including pre-deployment preparation for UN peacekeeping operations.

Myanmar and the Rohingya Crises

The on-going armed conflict in Myanmar, forced displacement of 1.2 million Rohingya, and tensions between residents of refugee camps and host communities, pose major challenges for Bangladesh. Amidst significant donor cuts, Australia's support is focusing on meeting basic needs to lessen the risk of further displacement, irregular migration and unrest. By reducing grievances and hopelessness, we are helping lower the risk of radicalisation and the vulnerability of children to forced or voluntary recruitment by armed actors.

The conflict has contributed to the region's longest standing humanitarian crises, threatening regional peace and stability. Since 2017, Australia has committed over $1.26 billion in humanitarian assistance to support the people of Myanmar, as well as Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and their host communities. Australia's new 3-year, $370 million humanitarian program starting in 2026, complements our bilateral programs in Myanmar and Bangladesh that are supporting human development and strengthening community participation.

Australia's DPP with the people of Myanmar includes conflict mitigation as an objective. Through our ODA, we are partnering with organisations and individuals, in both Myanmar and the broader region, to support inclusive dialogue and peacebuilding efforts. This includes ensuring women and marginalised groups can play a meaningful role in these processes. Australia is also supporting work with non-regime groups to strengthen their respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL). We are taking proactive steps to ensure our assistance does not go to the military regime nor lends it legitimacy.

In recognition of ASEAN leadership in seeking a peaceful resolution to the situation in Myanmar, Australia is also supporting coordinated and politically inclusive ASEAN-led engagement on the crisis. We will continue to support efforts to mitigate the conflict and its effects, while also protecting space for longer-term progress on human rights, rule of law, democratic space, gender equality and social inclusion.

Humanitarian action helps reduce pressures that can prolong and exacerbate conflict by mitigating its compounding impact on instability and reducing its most severe human consequences. By meeting basic needs and protecting the most vulnerable, humanitarian assistance can help contain spillover risks such as terrorism, violent extremism, irregular people movements, regional instability, disease outbreaks and other transnational threats. Access to basic services, education and protection can also reduce vulnerability to exploitation, including human trafficking and the recruitment of children and youth by armed actors. Australia's ODA also helps support early recovery efforts, assisting communities to begin to rebuild livelihoods and social cohesion as conditions allow. In many instances, our humanitarian assistance is complemented by bilateral and collective humanitarian diplomacy efforts to promote humanitarian access and reinforce principled humanitarian action.

Cambodia

Australia and Cambodia have a long history of working together in support of Cambodia's stability, resilience and prosperity, including our support for the 1990s peace process and the reconstruction efforts that followed. The Australia-Cambodia DPP seeks to support a Cambodia where all citizens can contribute and benefit equally. Our development investments have focused on supporting the Cambodian Government to deliver quality services, including improving health outcomes, strengthening social protection, and economic development through agriculture modernisation and water resource management. We are also working with Cambodian CSOs to strengthen citizen-led development, including support for human rights, and to empowering civil society participation in the nation's social and economic development.

Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands has faced several periods of instability and civil unrest, with unresolved disputes and reconciliation issues remaining from 'the Tensions' (between 1998 and 2003). Australia's development program is working in partnership to support the Solomon Islands Government implement its own National Development Strategy (2016-2035) and National Security Strategy (2025). We are helping to strengthen public institutions and build an effective and accountable state; support macroeconomic and fiscal stability; strengthen electoral administration and implementation of electoral reforms; improve access to justice and the capacity of judicial and correctional services; build the capacity of current and emerging leaders; and support civil society and local media to amplify local voices in support of peace and stability. In 2024, 47 community infrastructure projects were completed with the majority delivered by Solomon Islander firms and workers; 3,783 Solomon Islanders gained tertiary or vocational qualifications; and 3,344 services were provided to survivors of gender-based violence.

This is complemented by our Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) expansion partnership, and our longstanding RSIPF-AFP Policing Partnership Program and Defence Cooperation Program (DCP). Our current support builds on RAMSI (2003-2017), a partnership between Solomon Islands, Australia, and 15 contributing Pacific countries to restore stability and rebuild institutions. It also builds on the Solomons International Assistance Force (2021-2024), where Australia, Fiji and PNG worked with Solomon Islands to restore stability.

Sri Lanka

The legacy of unresolved ethno-religious tensions from Sri Lanka's civil war sustains conflict risks. Community-level disputes can escalate, with civil society playing a vital role in addressing the drivers of conflict and promoting unity and social cohesion. Australia's development partnership focuses on inclusive and sustainable growth, accountable governance and institutions, and community empowerment. Peace and reconciliation, building Sri Lanka's climate and disaster resilience (including after devastating Cyclone Ditwah), and assisting marginalised communities in the conflict-affected north and east are cross-cutting priorities.

Our longstanding support to civil society is sustained through programs such as the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), with Australia one of the largest contributors to de-mining since the end of the civil war. This has enabled the safe resettlement of over 300,000 displaced people and improved access to land for productive use, while supporting reconstruction of critical infrastructure such as roads, railways, and water and energy facilities. This has enabled growth in the poorest regions, reducing irregular migration risks. However, newly discovered contaminated land, following Cyclone Ditwah, threaten Sri Lanka's goal to be mine-free by 2027, so continued mine action support is essential to stability.

Post-conflict environments often remain fragile for extended periods, with a risk of relapse into violence if underlying drivers of conflict are not addressed. Depending on the severity of conflict, post-conflict restoration to pre-conflict conditions can take more than 30 years. Australia has a strong record of supporting post-conflict peace and stability in our region. Our leadership of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) remains a landmark example of regional cooperation, with Australia working for over a decade alongside Pacific

partners to restore law and order, rebuild institutions, and support Solomon Islands' recovery. In Bougainville and Timor-Leste, Australia's long-term development cooperation has supported peace processes and institution-building, democratic governance transition, livelihood recovery, and the delivery of essential services. These experiences highlight that our long-term support for locally led development can help consolidate peace and rebuild trust between citizens – with development cooperation an essential complement to diplomacy and other security restoration efforts.

Timor-Leste

Australia's conflict prevention efforts in Timor-Leste have evolved from leading the multinational International Force East Timor (INTERFET 1999-2000), to a comprehensive long-term partnership focused on building a secure, stable, and prosperous nation. This approach is articulated in the Australia-Timor-Leste DPP (2025–2030) with our ODA ($135.9 million, 2025-26) focused on underpinning stability, human development, economic resilience and core state functions. Our ODA investments in economic and public sector governance, health, education, municipal development, infrastructure and combatting GBV, support Timor-Leste's post-conflict recovery and growth and help strengthen social cohesion – reducing the likelihood of intra-group violence and boosting resilience to foreign interference. This is complemented by our policing and defence programs.

The Timor-Leste Police Development Program, a longstanding partnership between the Australian Federal Police and the National Police of Timor-Leste, focuses on community policing to support front-line responses to grievances and prevent small conflicts from escalating. The program is planning to expand into cybercrime and maritime policing to help combat transnational crime. Complementing this, the DCP is supporting Timor-Leste's armed forces and Ministry of Defence in peacekeeping training, humanitarian assistance and disaster response, and specialist capability in engineering, maritime security and infrastructure.

Regional Support

Australia is strengthening our regional approach to conflict prevention, working closely with regional institutions and architecture to underpin collective approaches to security and prosperity. Our development program – drawing on ODA and non-ODA and guided by our regional DPPs – provides a practical means to translate regional leaders' commitments into tangible outcomes that strengthen regional bonds and resilience. As Australia's Foreign Minister has noted:

"Regionalism is one of the most effective ways for smaller and medium countries to counter power asymmetries. We see this every day in the power and weight that ASEAN and the PIF carry when they speak with one voice. Both have the capacity to build norms and set expectations – for nations large and small."

Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia, ASEAN and its architecture (including the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum) provide preeminent platforms for dialogue, cooperation, and the reinforcement of norms of responsible state behaviour. Each of these elements are critical for the peaceful resolution of disputes. The 2025 ASEAN-Australia Leaders' Statement on Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management in the ASEAN-Led Regional Architecture reflects a shared commitment to maintaining a peaceful and stable region. Australia's ASEAN-focused development programs support implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2025-2029). They also help advance commitments from annual ASEAN-Australia Summits, such as the 2024 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit Leaders' Vision Statement – Partners for Peace and Prosperity and the Melbourne Declaration – A Partnership for the Future.

ASEAN-led Regional Security and Stability

Australia pursues a comprehensive conflict prevention agenda with ASEAN that aims to develop tools to de-escalate tensions and prevent crises in accordance with international law. This enhances Australia's reputation as a committed partner to ASEAN; and builds the capacity of the ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN Member States to engage in conflict prevention. Our conflict prevention dialogue and policy support to ASEAN has included:

– a series of workshops on conflict prevention, crisis management, counter-terrorism, violent extremism and ASEAN-led architecture, to strengthen habits of cooperation and dialogue essential for long-term peace

– annual UN Convention on the Law of the Sea training to ASEAN Member States and ASEAN Secretariat officials since 2023, building capacity of AMS to utilise Law of the Sea in their national interests, and

– $6 million to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) to support responses to humanitarian crises in Myanmar.

Australia is also supporting ASEAN through the ASEAN-Australia Political Security Partnership (APSP). APSP works with ASEAN Member State champions to build new areas of ASEAN-Australia cooperation and enhance regional stability by strengthening the ASEAN political-security architecture. APSP has delivered activities in conflict prevention, maritime security, cybersecurity, cybercrime, dis/misinformation, transnational crime, and women, peace and security. An evaluation found that these activities had "significantly enhanced engagement between ASEAN and Australian agencies"; had "positively contributed to regional stability and trust through enhanced coordination among law enforcement officials"; and had "enhanced ASEAN cross-sectoral linkages."

Australia is one of the few countries with a thematic Ambassador to Counter Modern Slavery, People Smuggling and Human Trafficking to drive regional and international cooperation on these issues. Through the Ambassador, Australia supports the region's response through the Bali Process and bolsters capacity building and partnerships. The ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking Program ($80 million, 2018-2028) strengthens regional criminal justice responses and victim-centred approaches.

Our development program is supporting the Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators advance women-led approaches to conflict resolution across the region and beyond. Using quiet diplomacy and trauma-informed dialogue, they prevent escalation and build trust in some of the world's most complex conflicts. Their work includes the Tuban Process in Timor-Leste, fostering reconciliation and repatriation; cross-regional exchanges in the Philippines and Southern Thailand; and embedded advisory support to ASEAN's Special Envoy on Myanmar. Through strategic partnerships with ASEAN and global networks, they demonstrate the power of women-led mediation.

Water Security

Intensifying challenges in the Mekong subregion include problems that cross borders, such as water insecurity, transnational crime, and economic shocks. Solutions require regional cooperation and response. Through the Mekong-Australia Transnational Crime Program we are supporting cross-border cooperation between Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam to tackle serious threats such as drug trafficking, child sexual exploitation and financial crimes; while the under the Mekong-Australia Partnership (MAP, $454 million, 2020-2029), we are strengthening Mekong resilience and capability to address these transboundary challenges and climate resilience with local partners (including the private sector, government, academia and civil society).

Water can play a significant role in conflict, linking geopolitical tensions directly to livelihoods, food security and health for millions of people. The Mekong River Commission's (MRC) role in mitigating the risk of water resource conflict has been key. Through MAP, Australia is supporting the MRC enhance its capabilities in flood forecasting, data modelling, communications and strategic planning – contributing to enhanced cooperation and coordination of water resources, and increasing trust and accountability among Mekong governments.

Beyond ASEAN, Australia's $1.28 billion development program in Southeast Asia is helping build regional partners' resilience across cyber and critical technologies, maritime security, supply chains, food and health systems, and climate adaption. For example, Australia's Southeast Asia Maritime Partnerships Program is investing $64 million over 4 years (2024-2025 to 2027-2028) to build resilience to shared maritime security threats, including to resolve maritime disputes peacefully and in accordance with international law; while Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040 is contributing to the region's infrastructure, clean energy, food and agriculture, and education and skills needs, with our $2 billion Southeast Asia Investment Financing Facility and Deal Teams supporting clean energy and infrastructure development to catalyse private Australian investment. Our Southeast Asia flagship programs, such as Partnerships for Infrastructure and Investing in Women, are also supporting regional prosperity.

South Asia

Instability and conflict in South Asia directly affect Australia's national security, migration patterns, and economic resilience. In response, we are supporting increased regional cooperation by strengthening the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the pre-eminent forum for addressing regional challenges. Australia's development program in South Asia ($356.8 million in 2025-26) is an essential pillar in our efforts to build regional resilience and stability, support strategic balance, prevent conflict, and help secure our border from transnational crime and terrorism. Our development program has an outsized impact in contributing to the response to the region's challenges, particularly in the face of global ODA reductions. Our sustained partnerships mean that Australia is perceived as a stable and reliable development partner, reinforcing our regional standing.

Australia is contributing to improved regional connectivity in South Asia through our South Asia Regional Infrastructure Connectivity program (SARIC). This provides countries with greater choice in developing infrastructure and trade, and supports capacity-building through infrastructure training opportunities. Our non-ODA maritime cooperation efforts are helping augment maritime safety and security, and boosting the region's sovereign capabilities to better respond to maritime and climate change threats. Similarly, Australia works closely with partners in the region to develop resilient information environments. Such environments play an important role in conflict prevention by reducing the space in which misinformation, disinformation, and inflammatory narratives can take hold and escalate tensions. Australia's programs support access to accurate information, build trust in credible institutions, and bolster skills to critically assess information so that societies are better equipped to manage disagreement without resorting to violence.

Pacific

In the Pacific, Australia works through the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and Pacific regional institutions to deepen integration and advance peace and security. Australia's development program is consistent with the expanded concept of security articulated in the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, that includes human security, environmental and resource security, transnational crime and cyber security. Our programs build institutional capability, foster deep institutional ties, and address core threats including climate change as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific.

We have prioritised investments to build resilience, strengthen institutions, and support Pacific-led solutions to counter regional challenges to sovereignty and security. This includes strengthening resilience across cyber and critical technologies, maritime security, supply chains, food and health systems, and climate adaptation. Concurrently, we are building economic resilience through trade facilitation, private sector and infrastructure development. Our economic governance programs are also helping address debt sustainability by supporting public financial management activities to strengthen partner's fiscal and debt policies and settings.

Australia is working with our Pacific partners to ensure our region is peaceful, stable and prosperous, with a shared regional capacity to defend sovereignty. This objective underpins PIF leaders' Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration (September 2025) and the peace and security thematic area of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific.

Australia's development program – both ODA and non-ODA – aims to address the drivers of internal instability and conflict, as well as build national and collective security capability. For instance, Australia is supporting:

- the PIF Secretariat, as a founding member, to progress regional initiatives to build a stronger and more unified Pacific family
- the Pacific Community (SPC) to deliver technical assistance to support Pacific Island countries address issues such as climate change, gender equality, food systems and oceans issues
- a broad range of Women, Peace and Security (WPS) activities, including Balance of Power, a Pacific-led initiative promoting women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes
- Pacific Island countries to build sovereign maritime and border security capabilities through our ODA investments ($3.6 million 2024-2027) with technical, legal and financial support to establish and finalise their maritime boundaries in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
- the Forum Fisheries Agency ($5 million ODA and $4.3 million non-ODA annually) to deliver sustainable management of fisheries to improve the capability of fisheries and law enforcement authorities to combat illegal fishing and transnational crime
- the Pacific Resilience Facility ($100 million) and the Pacific Climate Infrastructure Financing Partnership ($350 million) to boost investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, including rolling out off-grid renewable energy projects through the REnew Pacific program, and
- the regulatory environment and market conditions in Fiji, PNG and Samoa to help establish disaster insurance products for prompt payouts and to boost community climate resilience.

Australia is the Pacific's largest and most comprehensive development partner. By responding to Pacific leaders' and communities' highest priorities (including climate change, health strengthening, combatting HIV, skills development, opportunities for youth, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance), our development cooperation helps us maintain credibility and trust with our Pacific neighbours. Our international development program affords Australia goodwill and opens opportunity for dialogue that may otherwise be unavailable. It is a responsive and adaptable asset, able to pivot as new challenges emerge. Our success in signing transformational bilateral agreements (Nauru, Tuvalu, and PNG) is testament to our understanding of, and standing in, the region, including as a preferred partner on security cooperation.

Women's Leadership
Australia's development program is supporting the Pacific Women Mediators Network to amplify Pacific women's leadership in global forums—including the UN Security Council, the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), and nuclear disarmament efforts—shaping inclusive responses to insecurity and climate change. Its engagement with PIF leaders influenced the Ocean of Peace Declaration and learning exchanges in Bougainville, Fiji, Tonga and Solomon Islands have strengthened women's roles in mediation, transitional justice and disaster response.

Australia's development program underpins these agreements by supporting law and justice capability, economic resilience and social development. For example, the Falepili Union with Tuvalu includes a commitment by Australia to respond to a major natural disaster, a public health emergency of international concern, or military aggression against Tuvalu. Similarly, the Nauru-Australia Treaty includes commitments to enhance Nauru's capability to meet its economic and wider security needs, while the 2023 Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with PNG includes significant investment in law and justice capability to address domestic conflict risks and strengthen PNG's internal security. We are working to establish other agreements with Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu, which are also likely to be underpinned by our ODA investments.

We are boosting Pacific resilience in digital connectivity, access to banking services, and labour mobility. Using ODA and non-ODA investments in conjunction can have a 'development multiplier' effect. For example, we are using ODA and non-ODA to meet Australia's commitments to maintain banking services in the Pacific and Timor-Leste; labour mobility schemes to build skills and benefit economies; and investments in digital transformation and critical infrastructure (such as the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, AIFFP) to drive trade and regional economic security.

Supporting digital connectivity and regional trade is critical to expanding Pacific economic development opportunities. Australia's non-ODA support for Telstra's acquisition of Digicel Pacific – through a USD1.33 billion financing package with Export Finance Australia (EFA) – helped secure reliable telecommunications infrastructure for the Pacific. Digicel Pacific now operates across Fiji, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu – critical for economic development, digital inclusivity and connectivity.

Infrastructure

High quality, affordable and sustainable infrastructure drives economic and social development, and boosts prosperity, resilience and stability in partner countries. It also helps create economic linkages and integration between countries, encouraging and rewarding peace and cooperation. Through the AIFFP, Australia has committed over $2 billion (approximately $1.1 billion in loans and $850 million in grants) towards 58 critical infrastructure projects in 11 Pacific countries and Timor-Leste. This consists of large-scale infrastructure and small off-grid renewable energy projects delivered through the Pacific Climate Infrastructure Financing Partnership. The AIFFP has also catalysed more than $470 million in sovereign financing for Pacific infrastructure projects. Australia is also working to lift standards for quality infrastructure development, including through our endorsement of the Pacific Quality Infrastructure Principles and the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment. The use of ODA to support high quality infrastructure investment provides development partners with access to responsible lending that takes sovereignty, disaster resilience and sustainability into account.

In addition, Australia has committed over $350 million (ODA and non-ODA combined) since 2018 to support undersea cable connectivity in the Pacific and Timor-Leste. Well-connected and resilient digital infrastructure in the Pacific will bring critical economic and development benefits – boosting productivity, enhancing access to government services, transforming education and healthcare, and facilitating trade and investment. This support for resilient digital infrastructure also ensures Pacific communities can maintain critical communication channels during disaster events. We are similarly working to support access to banking services – essential for prosperity and financial inclusion. Australia secured a long-term commitment by the ANZ to maintain a presence in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, ensuring the Pacific continued access to banking services and the global economy.

Likewise, skills development and creating employment are priorities across the Pacific. The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme brings over 30,000 Pacific workers to Australia each year, boosting Pacific economies through labour mobility that promotes skills development, delivers remittances (estimated at $540 million in 2024-2025) and improves sustainable economic growth. Pacific countries' reliance on a narrow set of products and sectors, such as tourism, leaves them vulnerable to global disruptions. Schemes such as PALM demonstrate how Australia's ODA and non-ODA support can be used in conjunction to build economic resilience.

The Middle East

Stability in the Middle East remains highly relevant to Australia's national interest. As a middle power committed to conflict prevention, international law, and the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers in conflict, we have a role in supporting efforts to build peace in the region. Conflict and instability in the Middle East impact our national security and the safety of Australians, as it affects our domestic cohesion, creating rifts between diaspora groups and communities; contributes to radicalisation and the risk of home-grown terrorism and violent extremism; and it increases threats for Australians travelling overseas.

Our ODA is helping international partners respond to humanitarian crises in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. These efforts promote stability and help prevent further radicalisation by offering alternative pathways, supporting community resilience through education, health services and development, and mitigating the poverty and trauma that can be exploited by extremist groups. We are also working with international partners in the region to support the extension of public services to refugees and support education and livelihoods programs.

Gaza and the West Bank

Despite the deeply challenging operational environment, many people in need in Gaza and the West Bank have been reached by Australian-supported assistance. The ICRC distributed household items such as blankets, water containers, tarpaulins and hygiene kits to 1,882,100 displaced people; UNICEF helped over a million people access clean water; and WFP assisted 1.1 million people with food assistance. Australia's humanitarian assistance in Gaza has been enabled by our joint diplomatic efforts to promote humanitarian access and uphold humanitarian principles in the delivery of support.

Multilateral Support

Peace and security are collective global challenges that require collective solutions. The UN and other multilateral institutions provide platforms to shape global norms, coordinate responses, and amplify Australia's bilateral and regional efforts. Australia's development support enhances multilateral institutions to protect internationally agreed rules and norms, as well as boost global capacity in preventive diplomacy, atrocity prevention, conflict analysis and policy advice.

Australia has tripled our ODA contribution to the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to $15 million per year, recognising the importance of flexible, preventative financing in fragile contexts. We have also been a consistent supporter of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, providing $7.5 million since 2021 to support UN conflict prevention work. Australia is also working closely with UN agencies in supporting the peace processes in Bougainville and conflict prevention efforts in PNG's Highlands.

Australia is also championing conflict prevention during our current term on the UN PBC (2025-2026). As a flagship initiative we are developing policy guidance on National Prevention Strategies to support nationally led conflict prevention approaches. The project has been welcomed as a practical tool globally and in our region. In PNG, PBC advice, together with PBF financial support, contributed to the development of a National Prevention Strategy. As a result of this PBC/ PBF support, PNG will now be the first country outside of Africa to access World Bank funding through the Bank's Fragility, Conflict and Violence Envelope.

The UN Peacebuilding Fund

Australian funding to the PBF in 2024 helped support 157 projects in 49 countries and territories (including PNG, Sri Lanka, Fiji, and the Philippines) to:

– improve trust in institutions by over 44 per cent
– create or support nearly 2,000 peace dialogues
– achieve a 55 per cent average increase in people reporting improvement in peace within their communities
– provide livelihood support to more than 80,000 people – primarily women, youth and indigenous people – with a 60 per cent average improvement in community livelihoods
– a nearly 50 per cent average increase in project beneficiaries' perception of basic services improvement
– increase by 50 per cent the participation of women and youth in PBF-supported governance structures
– help nearly 12,500 returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) benefit from counselling and legal assistance, and more than 7,000 refugees receiving interim camp services, and
– support nearly 6,000 indigenous peoples take part in income generating activities and more than 3,100 persons with disabilities to be trained in conflict prevention.

Australia played a leading role in the 2025 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review, convening a coalition of middle-power partners to embed conflict prevention in UN peacebuilding work and strengthen UN coordination at country-level. This process stressed the role of civil society (including women and youth) and multilateral development banks (MDBs), including the World Bank, in UN peacebuilding efforts. Our leadership on the PBC and in the Peacebuilding Architecture Review demonstrates our ability to convene coalitions, drive systemic reforms to embed conflict prevention and put inclusive approaches at the heart of UN operations. By upholding global norms and strengthening prevention frameworks, Australia's multilateral engagement reduces the risk of instability spilling into our region, helps protect our economic and security interests, and reinforces our reputation as a principled and influential middle power in bolstering global security governance.

Humanitarian Action

Australia's Humanitarian Policy commits DFAT to embedding conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis resilience into our development policies and programs – to reduce humanitarian need by addressing conflict drivers. Australia's ODA contributions to the international humanitarian system supports its resilience and credibility. In an increasingly contested strategic environment, adherence to international law and support for the international humanitarian system to facilitates states' collective engagement on political solutions is critical. Respect for IHL and IHRL is a pre-requisite for conflict prevention, helping to reduce cycles of violence and human suffering in conflict. Australia has elevated its action on IHL, including championing the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, and by co-chairing a workstream under the ICRC-led Global Initiative to Galvanise Political Commitment to IHL (Global IHL Initiative) to help take the Initiative forward.

In complex and dangerous humanitarian contexts with armed violence and diversion risks (including terrorism financing), we work with capable and experienced partners with robust systems and processes to mitigate fraud, corruption and financing risks. These humanitarian partners – UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international and local NGOs – are often present for decades in conflict settings, acting as a bridge to prevent conflict escalation and facilitate peace initiatives. While humanitarian action cannot substitute for political action to end conflicts, humanitarian actors can contribute to peace prospects.

Health Security

Health crises can exacerbate conflict by eroding public trust and disrupting trade and economies. Australia's ODA investments in health security strengthen global and regional health systems, improve disease surveillance, and enhance regional health response capacity. This reduces the risk of cross-border health emergencies and builds resilience in communities vulnerable to health threats. Strengthening public health architecture also helps create dialogue and to mitigate against crisis escalation. In multilateral health forums, Australia advocates for the protection of civilians, health workers and health infrastructure in conflict.

Our multilateral support helps strengthen international cooperation to prevent, prepare for, and respond to health emergencies, including pandemics. This includes investments in global funds (Pandemic Fund, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and Gavi the Vaccine Alliance) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Our funding to WHO ($63 million; 2025-2028) supports WHO's work on peace, conflict and health; and enabled the WHO Health Emergencies Programme to provide life-saving health services in crises such as Myanmar, Syria and South Sudan, and to secure humanitarian pauses in Gaza in 2025 to deliver polio vaccination campaigns.

Australia's ODA is supporting Pacific regional health mechanisms, such as the WHO-led Joint Incident Management Team for coordinated outbreak preparedness and response. Our regional health investments prioritise building health emergency and outbreak response capacity, including though the Regional Emergency and Critical Care Systems Strengthening Initiative in the Pacific and Timor-Leste; and training public health specialists in Southeast Asia and the Pacific through Australia's National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre.

Aid for Trade

Australia's trade-related technical assistance supports our partners to benefit from global, regional, and bilateral rules-based trade. We provide this support through our bilateral and regional trade agreements, and our multilateral Aid for Trade program, which assists development partners to benefit from the multilateral trading system through the World Trade Organization (WTO). This assistance helps our partners meet their national trade and development objectives, recognising the importance of transparent trade rules and norms in enabling all countries to cooperate, trade, and thrive. However, trust in the stable and rules-based international trading system, centred on the WTO – which has underpinned global prosperity and security for decades – is being eroded through recent trade disruptions and the system's inability to keep pace with emerging challenges.

Australia is working to strengthen and reform the WTO so that it remains responsive to the needs of all members, including developing economies, and continues to provide a predictable framework for resolving trade tensions. We are helping to drive a forward program for WTO reform work ahead of the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference in March 2026.

As Minister Wong has said, economic integration provides a critical incentive for peace, as economies share the benefits of prosperity.[14] Australia's Aid for Trade investments make an important contribution to promoting prosperity, regional economic integration, and building institutions supportive of rules-based trade – reinforcing our wider conflict prevention efforts. Some notable examples are our $50 million Regional Trade for Development program, which supports ASEAN's implementation of our joint free trade agreements, and our latest commitment of $14.5 million to the PIF Secretariat's Geneva Office to assist Pacific partners to engage in the multilateral trading system and benefit from access to stable, transparent, and diverse international markets.

Climate Finance

Climate change is an accelerator of instability. Water, land, energy and food insecurity undermines economic growth, exacerbates social and health vulnerabilities, and erodes resilience. Through investments such as the Climate Resilient Communities program (CRC, $234.9 million over 2024-2029) our ODA is, for example, addressing food insecurity in Tuvalu, Kiribati and Fiji, by increasing household fruit and vegetable production and consumption, and combatting saltwater intrusion with climate-adapted gardens and food preservation. The CRC is also partnering with Cambodia to withstand climate impacts by strengthening water governance across 3 river basins, and promoting inclusive water strategies, involving women, people with disabilities and Indigenous peoples.

Global Arms Control and Disarmament

Australia's efforts in arms control and counter proliferation go hand in hand with conflict prevention. Arms control reduces the proliferation of weapons, lowering the risk of escalation and making diplomatic solutions more viable. By tackling the illegal diversion of arms, states can build trust and create conditions for conflict prevention, contributing towards long-term stability and peace. Australia is party to several arms control conventions and regimes including the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. We support states to join and implement these treaties, in line with our commitment to support their global uptake and implementation.

Australia also contributes around $2.1 million per annum in ODA to mine action, with our contribution going to trusted organisations working to assist states with arms regulation and demining efforts, including unexploded ordnance risk reduction in the Pacific. Australia grants ODA to disarmament NGOs, such as the ATT Monitor, and the Small Arms Survey to counter the illicit transfer of Small Arms and Light Weapons globally.

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[14] CEDA State of Nation conference dinner 26 June 2024, Speech to ANU National Security College 9 April 2024.

Australia's ODA for disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response also reinforces resilience and stability. Our contributions support partner governments, regional organisations, NGOs and multilateral partners improve disaster planning, response preparedness, and to access disaster risk financing, including through Australia's partnership with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), to build resilience to all forms of disaster risk.

Beyond the UN, Australia's development program supports conflict prevention and peacebuilding across a range of multilateral forums and thematic priorities – including Women Peace and Security, arms control and disarmament, and mine action – recognising that conflict is multi-dimensional, and that effective prevention requires coordinated action across political, economic, human rights, humanitarian and development domains. We partner with MDBs, the International Red Cross and Red Cresent Movement, the OECD Development Assistance Committee, and other multilateral agencies in support of global conflict prevention efforts.

Women, Peace and Security

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is made up of 10 UN Security Council resolutions that collectively recognise the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and call for their meaningful participation and leadership in all conflict prevention, peace and security processes. The evidence supporting implementation of the WPS agenda is compelling – peace agreements involving women are 30 per cent more likely to endure, and peace agreements signed by women include more political reforms and have higher implementation rates. Despite this, women remain largely absent from formal negotiations. In 2024, women comprised just 7 per cent of negotiators and 14 per cent of mediators globally, with only 31 per cent of peace agreements including gender -related provisions, and only two referencing gender-based violence (UNSG 2025 Report on WPS).

Australia's actions on WPS are guided by the second National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS 2021-31 which is a ten-year, whole-of-government strategy developed in consultation with Australian academia and CSOs. Its overarching goal is that in the context of increasing insecurity, including climate-related risks, women and girls realise their human rights and achieve meaningful participation and leadership in all of Australia's efforts to prevent and resolve conflict and build enduring peace. DFAT supports ODA investments in NAP implementation and integrates WPS into broader ODA programming. (See DFAT's submission to the JSCFADT Inquiry into Gender Equality as a National Security and Economic Security Imperative).

Multilateral Development Banks

Australia's ODA contributions to MDBs amplify our influence in promoting stability. By pooling resources through the MDBs, Australia leverages scale and technical expertise to deliver infrastructure, governance reforms, and climate projects that reduce conflict drivers. Working in partnership with the MDBs also helps catalyse private investment to grow available development finance. For example, Australia's work with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has attracted private sector funding through the Australian Climate Finance Partnership to invest in sustainable forestry in the Solomon Islands. We are also co-investing with the ADB in the Indo-Pacific to deliver renewable energy, digital connectivity, and strengthen economic resilience.

The World Bank Group is Australia's largest development partner and the world's largest development organisation. The Group consists of several entities, including the International Development Association (IDA), which is the world's largest pool of concessional finance – providing grants and highly concessional loans to 75 low-income countries, including 21 in the Indo-Pacific, to reduce poverty, boost growth, and build resilience. Our membership of, and financial contributions to, the World Bank Group provide us with opportunity to influence the Group's policies and priorities. An ongoing objective is to ensure the World Bank Group targets development priorities in the Indo–Pacific region. The Group is an unparalleled source of development analysis and specialist program implementation, and a leading forum for global development policy, particularly in the interaction between conflict and development. Together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank maintains the definitive list of countries classified as fragile and conflict-affected – see Appendix A.

Partnering with the International Committee of the Red Cross

Australia's strategic partnership with the ICRC is supporting the ICRC's humanitarian operations in over 15 countries and regions affected by armed conflict, helping assist more than 5.8 million people with improved access to clean water and sanitation, income-generating assistance, and livelihood recovery. Australia's annual core contribution ($27.5 million) enables the ICRC to respond rapidly to escalations in conflict and to sustain operations in protracted crises such as in Yemen. The ICRC's role as an independent, impartial and neutral intermediary affords it access to vulnerable populations in hard-to-reach and high-risk environments. Australia has stepped up our partnership with ICRC in promoting best practice in preventing IHL violations and supporting ICRC's advocacy to promote adherence to IHL and to reduce human suffering in war.

LEVERAGING OUR NETWORKS

Australia's development partnerships give DFAT an extensive network of local, regional and multilateral actors who provide critical insight, early warning and opportunities for early intervention on instability and conflict risks.

In the Philippines, for example, Australia's support for a women's peace mediators collective has enabled early identification of rising tensions and facilitated rapid, community-led conflict resolution before disputes escalate. Women's rights organisations engaged in peace and conflict mediation are often among the first to detect indicators of potential escalation — such as political instability, civil unrest, environmental stress or population displacement — making them highly effective early-warning partners. In other contexts, village court and community justice programs play a similar role by signalling rising communal tensions and providing accessible dispute resolution.

Close cooperation with regional bodies such as ASEAN and the PIF, and with multilateral organisations including the UN, ICRC and MDBs, provides DFAT with another layer of real-time insights into emerging risks and entry points for conflict mitigation and resolution. Subnational governance programs (such as in Nepal) and election support (such as in Sri Lanka) also offer a "pulse check" on political stability and community sentiment.

DFAT also draws on the analysis and on-the-ground reporting of NGOs, local CSOs, think tanks and academic institutions, including the International Crisis Group, The Asia Foundation, the Lowy Institute and the ANU National Security College. These partners help track shifts in conflict dynamics, governance stress points and emerging security risks. In addition, DFAT's Responsibility to Protect (R2P) partners — the Asia-Pacific Centre for R2P, the Global Centre for R2P, and the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and R2P — provide early warning of gross human rights violations and other atrocity risks, monitoring state behaviour and obligations under IHL.

Together, these networks form a comprehensive early-warning and insight system, enabling Australia to anticipate conflict risks, shape timely responses, and support partners' work to prevent escalation before crises take hold.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE OUR EFFORTS

Australia's development program already delivers significant conflict-prevention benefits through bilateral, regional and multilateral investments. However, there is clear scope to deepen and better embed these efforts. Key opportunities include:

1. Deliver as a consistent and reliable partner

Sustaining and growing Australia's development program — enabled by annual indexation of the ODA budget from 2026–27 — will ensure it remains a well-resourced conflict-prevention asset. A stable and predictable ODA trajectory underpins development effectiveness and our influence in shaping international development cooperation.

2. Address global humanitarian needs holistically

With humanitarian needs escalating, Australia must continue to prevent and prepare for crises, strengthen regional disaster resilience, and sustain the ability to respond to major emergencies. Integrating long-term development, human rights and peacebuilding objectives into humanitarian responses will help reduce crises and support durable recovery.

3. Maintain focus on the Indo-Pacific

While responding to major crises outside the region, Australia must remain committed to long-term partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. Development effectiveness rests on sustained relationships that strengthen inclusive development, state institutions, service delivery, human capital and social cohesion, all core for stability.

4. Extend advocacy for humanitarian principles and norms

Australia can build on its global leadership in protecting humanitarian personnel by advancing regional adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law. This complements implementation of the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, support for the ICRC's Global IHL Initiative, and efforts to strengthen global conflict-prevention settings.

5. Improve global conflict-prevention architecture

Australia is well positioned to champion improvements to the international conflict-prevention system — including preventive diplomacy and atrocity-prevention mechanisms. Strengthened engagement with the PBC and PBF, and Australia's lead role in the 2025 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review, provides a strong platform for a new initiative that could also support Australia's 2029–2030 UN Security Council campaign.

6. Strengthen regional engagement and integration

There is growing interest from ASEAN and other regional organisations to enhance their conflict-prevention and mediation roles. Australia can build on commitments under the ASEAN-Australia Joint Leaders' Statement on Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management, support revitalisation of the ARF's preventative diplomacy mandate, and leverage the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2026 to highlight this work.

7. Reinforce whole-of-government coordination

Deepening whole-of-government coordination across subnational, regional and geopolitical levels of conflict risk will strengthen coherence between defence, diplomacy, development, humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts. Shared analysis and integrated planning will maximise national impact.

8. Support civil society conflict-prevention dialogue

Regular, structured dialogue with NGOs, diaspora groups, think tanks and academia could strengthen early-warning insights and policy coherence. Building on initiatives such as the Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy and Defence Dialogue could anchor this engagement.

9. Further embed conflict-risk analysis in development programming

Mid-cycle reviews of DPPs in mid-2026 provide an opportunity to update conflict-risk assessments and ensure partnerships are aligned to emerging threats, instability drivers and new opportunities for resilience-building.

Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel
Australia launched the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel at the UN General Assembly High-level Week in September 2025. The Declaration sets out practical and actionable steps to improve the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, with 110 countries having endorsed it to date. Australia has committed $15 million to support the Declaration's implementation. Complementing this work, Australia has joined the ICRC-led Global IHL Initiative and is co-chairing a workstream to help take the Initiative forward. Our initiation and successful convening of cross-regional support for the Declaration, and our support for the Global IHL Initiative, demonstrates our ability to lead global initiatives in the humanitarian protection and conflict prevention space.

Strengthening DFAT's Role

DFAT is well placed to expand its contribution to conflict prevention. The establishment of the Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch (2024) strengthens whole-of-government coordination and supports integration of conflict-prevention principles across geographic, thematic and policy work. While implementation remains decentralised across divisions, DFAT will continue to improve coordination and alignment within the Department, across government and with international partners.

CONCLUSION

Preventing tensions, crises and rivalry in our region from escalating into conflict is essential to protecting Australia's security and prosperity. Protracted conflict imposes immense human costs, drives humanitarian needs, exacerbates displacement and irregular migration, fuels transnational crime and terrorism, disrupts trade and investment, and leaves states more vulnerable to coercion.

Australia's development program is a powerful, cost-effective conflict-prevention asset and a core pillar of integrated statecraft. Working across bilateral, regional and global levels, our development, humanitarian, diplomacy and defence efforts reinforce each other to prevent escalation, strengthen partners' sovereign capabilities and build resilience. By embedding conflict prevention at the heart of our development program and coordinated national effort, Australia can help shape a region that favours peace, preserves sovereignty and sustains long-term prosperity.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF FRAGILE AND CONFLICT AFFECTED STATES

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

FY26 LIST OF FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED STATES (FCS)[1]

Conflict	Institutional and Social Fragility
Afghanistan	Burundi
Burkina Faso	Chad
Cameroon	Comoros
Central African Republic	Republic of Congo
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Eritrea
Ethiopia	Guinea-Bissau
Haiti	Kiribati
Iraq	Libya
Lebanon	Marshall Islands
Mali	Federated States of Micronesia
Mozambique	Papua New Guinea
Myanmar	São Tomé and Príncipe
Niger	Solomon Islands
Nigeria	Timor-Leste
Somalia	Tuvalu
South Sudan	República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Sudan	Zimbabwe
Syrian Arab Republic	
Ukraine	
West Bank and Gaza[2]	
Republic of Yemen	

NOTES:

[1] As of July 11, 2025. For additional information on IMF support to FCS, see https://www.imf.org/fcs.

[2] For purposes of Fund relations, the West Bank and Gaza (WBG) fall under Israeli jurisdiction in accordance with Article XXXI, Section 2(g) of the Articles of Agreement.

APPENDIX B: KEY ARTICLES AND REPORTS

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APPENDIX C: REVIEWS AND ASSESSMENTS OF AUSTRALIAN SUPPORT

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APPENDIX D: ACRONYMS

ADB - Asian Development Bank

AFP - Australian Federal Police

AIFFP - Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific

AMS - ASEAN Member States

APSP - ASEAN-Australia Political Security Partnership

ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ATT - Arms Trade Treaty

BARMM - Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

CHD - Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

CRC - Climate Resilient Communities

DCP - Defence Cooperation Program

DFAT - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

DPP - Development Partnership Plan

GBV - Gender-Based Violence

ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross

IDP - International Development Policy

IDPs - Internally Displaced Persons

IHL - International Humanitarian Law

IHRL - International Human Rights Law

IMF - International Monetary Fund

IORA - Indian Ocean Rim Association

JSCFADT - Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

MAP - Mekong-Australia Partnership

MDB - Multilateral Development Bank

NGO - Non-Government Organisation

ODA - Overseas Development Assistance

PBC - UN Peacebuilding Commission

PBF - UN Peacebuilding Fund

PIF - Pacific Islands Forum

PNTL - National Police of Timor-Leste (Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste)

RAMSI - Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands

RSIPF - Royal Solomon Islands Police Force

SARIC - South Asia Regional Infrastructure Connectivity

SGBV - Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

SRHR - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

TLPDP - Timor-Leste Police Development Program

UNCLOS - United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNDRR - United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

UNHJP - UN Highlands Joint Programme

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

UNSC - United Nations Security Council

WASH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

WFP - World Food Programme

WHO - World Health Organization

WPS - Women, Peace and Security

WRO - Women's Rights Organisation