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Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Topic: Inquiry into the role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict

Senator Tim Watts

Question

PROBLEM DEFINITION/ COORDINATION

1. What model is DFAT using to implement conflict prevention across diplomacy, development and security programs?
 - 1a. where in departmental policy or guidance is that model formally defined?
2. Who is responsible for coordinating conflict prevention across DFAT?
3. Who is responsible for coordinating conflict prevention across the whole government?

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5. Does the government need a formalised focal point for coordination?
6. Does the government need a formalised integrated framework for conflict prevention efforts?
7. Would a formalised conflict prevention framework support with establishing a deliberate network approach which links expertise from across government?
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13. What would the Branch need to do to shift its focus from major power conflict to a broader focus including on intra-state conflict?

DFAT SUBMISSION

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it happen?

21. How does the department incorporate advice and feedback from NGOs on the ground in conflict prevention settings?

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22a. What more can be done to integrate community and diaspora views and expertise for conflict prevention?

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25. When humanitarian workers are harmed or obstructed in the Indo-Pacific, what practical steps does Australia currently take, and are those steps sufficient?

26. Is Australia's voice on international humanitarian law more effective when taken bilaterally with individual countries, or through multilateral forums? What does the evidence suggest?

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Answer

PROBLEM DEFINITION/ COORDINATION

1. What model is DFAT using to implement conflict prevention across diplomacy, development and security programs?

a. Where in departmental policy or guidance is that model formally defined?

Australia is investing in all tools of national power - diplomatic, economic, defence, development and other means - to contribute to a strategic balance that keeps the peace in the Indo-Pacific region.

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding are core business across DFAT. Conflict prevention is embedded in high-level policies, in our regional and bilateral partnerships and diplomacy, and in our multilateral engagement.

Australia's International Development Policy (2023) sets the overarching objective of advancing a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. By promoting capable, accountable states and institutions, Australia's development assistance helps countries in our region recover from shocks and withstand aggression and coercion. Our development program helps to address the key drivers of conflict – poverty, inequality, and weak institutions – and supports inclusive development, which reduces the risk of conflict.

Australia's Humanitarian Policy (2024) commits to embedding conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis resilience across our humanitarian action. It aims to mitigate the worst impacts of conflict, reduce competition for basic resources, and limit the cross-border spillover consequences of local conflicts.

Preparedness for crises and advocacy for adherence to international law are key priorities.

Complementary strategies, such as *Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy (2025)* and *International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy (2024)*, ensure a focus on inclusion and reflect whole-of-Government frameworks such as *Australia's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda*.

DFAT's Multilateral Policy and Human Rights Division (MPD) ensures our multilateral peacebuilding work is aligned with Australia's broader conflict prevention agenda. Australia joined the UN Peacebuilding Commission for a two-year term in January 2025. Ahead of this term the Foreign Minister agreed five priority areas which were aligned to existing policies. These were strengthening the multilateral peacebuilding architecture, deepening focus on conflict prevention, supporting our region, championing inclusion, and protecting civilians, including humanitarian workers.

2. Who is responsible for coordinating conflict prevention across DFAT?

As a core part of diplomacy, conflict prevention is embedded across DFAT's work streams in Canberra and our network of Posts.

The Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch was established in September 2024 to coordinate policy on the rising risk of inter-state conflict, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, and to work across government and with regional partners in support of the role non-military tools could play in preventing conflict. This followed the release of the *National Defence Strategy (NDS)* in April 2024, which reaffirmed the assessment that Australia no longer had a 10-year strategic warning window for major conflict in the Indo-Pacific. The NDS highlighted the importance of using military and non-military tools to contribute to a favourable regional strategic balance that deters coercion and aggression and keeps the peace.

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Conflict prevention efforts (including peacebuilding) relating to specific countries and intra-state (sub-national) conflicts are led within DFAT by geographic bilateral programs and associated multilateral, development and humanitarian programs. These programs and partnerships are a fundamental part of the government's conflict prevention agenda, helping to address root causes of conflict and fragility, including through enhancing state and community resilience.

3. Who is responsible for coordinating conflict prevention across the whole government?

Conflict prevention efforts are coordinated through interdepartmental mechanisms led by DFAT, working with the Departments of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Defence, Home Affairs and the intelligence community, depending on the context. These arrangements draw on existing national security and foreign policy coordination structures rather than a standing conflict prevention architecture.

Relevant areas of DFAT working on conflict prevention measures and lines of effort meet regularly, including with other government agencies, to share ideas and strengthen internal coordination. For example, government officials undertake scenario planning in response to potential conflict, underpinned by Office of National Intelligence (ONI) analysis.

OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION

4. Does a lack of formalised coordination and architecture/ frameworks across government mean governments are relying on individual expertise, rather than institutional frameworks?

We do not rely on individual expertise, rather on APS institutionalised habits of coordination and consultation that support interagency cooperation.

This coordination framework is underpinned by policies and strategies which articulate and guide government's conflict prevention efforts, per responses to question 1.

5. Does the government need a formalised focal point for coordination?

The scale and complexity of conflict prevention efforts, ranging from interstate conflict to civil conflict, peacebuilding or atrocity prevention, means the government needs to maintain flexibility in how we prevent, prepare for and respond to conflict. Existing coordination mechanisms, including through professional networks and communities of practice, and regular inter-departmental cooperation, preserve agility in response to changing strategic circumstances.

6. Does the government need a formalised integrated framework for conflict prevention efforts?

We take an integrated approach to address mutually reinforcing risks and judge that current policies across Government provide a sufficient framework to guide Australia's conflict prevention efforts. A formalised framework may have some advantages, but it also risks locking in assumptions that quickly become outdated, reducing government flexibility in preventing, preparing for and responding to conflict. Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch's focus on inter-state conflict prevention activities in the Indo-Pacific uses a range of approaches and tools, including working with other Australian government

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agencies, key partners in Southeast Asia and international partners to uphold peace and stability and ensure differences are managed through dialogue and in accordance with international law.

Conflict prevention efforts relating to intra-state conflicts are context specific: understanding the local conditions, actors and conflict drivers are vital to achieving conflict prevention aims. Our country and regional Development Partnership Plans (DPPs), which set priorities in each context, are prepared in consultation with partner governments, civil society, business, academia, and other Australian Government agencies. We have finalised 20 DPPs to date – for conflict-affected countries, such as Myanmar and the Philippines, the DPPs include a focus on conflict prevention and stability.

Our multilateral peacebuilding work draws on the UN's conflict prevention expertise takes a similar approach to intra-state and regional programming as described above.

7. Would a formalised conflict prevention framework support with establishing a deliberate network approach which links expertise from across government?

We agree that structured ways to access expertise across Government is vital to our conflict prevention efforts. The infrastructure of networking and whole-of-government coordination on specific topics – including shared platforms, information exchange, cross agency exercise and joint engagements – provides mechanisms that link people and capabilities across government to achieve the best outcomes.

The terms of reference for this inquiry span fragility and sub-national concerns as well as major power geopolitical dynamics, highlighting the difficulty of applying a single policy approach to conflict prevention. For example, whole-of-Government engagement on maritime security in the region is led by specific teams with mandates and expertise to lead on this agenda. In contrast, country-specific conflict prevention issues will be best addressed bilaterally in Canberra and at Post.

8. What efforts have been made since these 2020 recommendations to strengthen APS capability with regards to conflict prevention?

Since 2020, we have established the Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch to lead DFAT's efforts on conflict prevention and de-escalation activities in the Indo-Pacific and national resilience and preparedness, drawing on all the elements of our national power. The branch has partnered with academics and non-government thinktanks to deliver tailored courses and training to uplift internal conflict prevention knowledge and capability within DFAT. For example, the Branch has worked with UNSW to build a common understanding of key conflict prevention concepts, and develop strategies for times of crisis.

DFAT has also run cross-agency conflict prevention-focused structured analytical processes to identify capabilities and areas for improvement and participated in exercises across government as part of efforts to strengthen capability across the APS.

Staff have also participated in a UN training program to deepen their expertise on UN approaches to preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention, to help contextualise and guide Australia's efforts in this area.

More broadly, DFAT's Diplomatic Academy provides DFAT staff with access to a range of relevant courses, training and professional development relevant to conflict prevention, including introductory and

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advanced courses in humanitarian action, political economy analysis, and locally led development. Training is also incorporated into our humanitarian partnerships, including through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) at a local level. We continue to enhance development capability, drawing on funding of \$36.8 million (over four years) included in the government's 2023-24 budget.

9. What efforts have been made to enhance access to information and advice for Australian government officials?

DFAT's Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch supports efforts to enhance access to information and advice for Australian government officials. The Branch strengthens whole-of-government coordination and supports integration of conflict-prevention principles across geographic, thematic and policy work.

In addition, the Australian Centre for Civil-Military Coordination (ACMC) develops and delivers tools to better equip Australian civilian, military and police agencies to respond to crises and contingencies. ACMC works to build cooperation between civilian, military and police agencies in support of Australia's security, stabilisation, humanitarian and peace efforts and is staffed by officials from several government agencies, including DFAT. ACMC also works with partners in the Indo-Pacific, including the United Nations, to share these tools through education, training, exercises and research.

To enhance access to information and advice on conflict issues for Australian government officials, we have standing arrangements to establish Intergovernmental Departmental Committees (IDCs) and response taskforces when crises occur that require coordinated government action. For example, DFAT has activated these whole-of-government mechanisms to respond to the current crisis in the Middle East. As part of this effort, DFAT is proactively monitoring its broader impacts and trends on the Indo-Pacific region – including that sustained economic pressure could translate into food insecurity or broader social disruption.

10. Why haven't these systems improved since 2020?

The Australian Government has continued to strengthen existing governance, capability and coordination arrangements to respond to a more contested and volatile strategic environment.

This includes the establishment of the Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch, enhanced use of Governance Committees (including the Development Program Committee) within DFAT for strategic contestability, and increased investment in analytical capability. Our approach, structures, and systems will continue to support this agenda.

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INTRA- AND INTER-STATE CONFLICT

11. Do you agree that the Conflict Prevention Branch primarily focuses on major power conflict risks rather than intra-state conflict?

Yes.

12. How does DFAT operationalise the relationship between intra-state and inter-state conflict?

DFAT takes an integrated approach to understanding and responding to inter-state and intra-state conflict, which are treated as mutually reinforcing risks. Intra- and inter-state conflict exist on a continuum, from localised fragility and intra-state drivers to inter-state escalation, strategic competition and the risk of major power conflict. Local fragility creates strategic opportunity; major power competition exacerbates local grievances.

In practice, the relationship is operationalised by constant and ongoing collaboration across Divisions within DFAT, across Government agencies and with DFAT's overseas Posts, guided by DPPs and humanitarian programs. DFAT is approaching this continuum from two ends simultaneously: through development and humanitarian programming that addresses local conflict drivers; and through the strategic end that engages with interstate escalation risk.

13. What would the Branch need to do to shift its focus from major power conflict to a broader focus including on intra-state conflict?

Shifting the focus of Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch would detract from its primary focus and duplicate functions best managed elsewhere in DFAT, particularly areas with greater expertise in development policy and the use of ODA to deliver specific outcomes.

DFAT SUBMISSION

14. What concrete changes (such as new programs, new capabilities, or new decision processes), have been or will be introduced specifically to respond to rising conflict risks, beyond relabelling existing work?

a. How are programs going to be adjusted or budgets reallocated to reflect this priority?

DFAT has established the Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch to focus on, and pilot, a number of initiatives. This has included stepping up cooperation with regional partners and conducting workshops with ASEAN to build a common understanding of the various tools we can use to promote dialogue, de-escalate tensions and deter coercive and aggressive behaviour. The *ASEAN-Australia Joint Leaders' Statement on Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management in the ASEAN-led Regional Architecture* was adopted at the *5th Annual ASEAN-Australia Summit on 28 October 2025*, a demonstration of ASEAN's support of and commitment to our shared conflict prevention agenda.

DFAT has also deepened engagement with regional partners through cooperation and high-level arrangements. For example, in August 2025 at the Ninth Australia-Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministers' 2+2 Meeting [28 August, Canberra], Ministers agreed the *Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Peace and Stability* to advance bilateral cooperation on conflict prevention. Under our enhanced bilateral Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) with Singapore [announced 8 October 2025], Australia and

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Singapore agreed to work on conflict prevention, including through regular expert-to-expert exchanges, to build our collective capacity to maintain the conditions for peace and stability. Practical initiatives already implemented include a senior officials' Track 1.5 workshop, with a focus on holistic approaches to conflict prevention.

Australia's development program also delivers significant conflict prevention benefits through bilateral, regional and multilateral investments. DFAT's submission identified key opportunities to deepen and embed these efforts, including through: championing improvements to the international conflict prevention system; addressing humanitarian needs holistically and advocating for humanitarian principles and norms; reinforcing whole-of-government coordination; and further embedding conflict-risk analysis in development programming.

DFAT continues to consider how best to respond to rising conflict risks through our development policy and programming. Mid-cycle reviews of DPPs, expected to commence in mid- to late 2026, will provide an opportunity to test strategic assumptions and approaches, and update conflict-risk assessments and other relevant analysis, to enable further program adaptation as needed.

DFAT builds flexibility into departmental, development and humanitarian budgets to ensure Australia can pivot and respond to opportunities and challenges as they emerge. For example, to respond to global instability and tightening donor budgets, the Government took deliberate and strategic decisions to reprioritise the 2025-26 ODA budget to ensure we could meet urgent and emerging needs in the Indo-Pacific. Further, DFAT reprioritised departmental resourcing to support the establishment of the Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch in the Defence and National Security Division in 2024.

In September 2024, ahead of our term on the UN PBC, Australia tripled its contribution to the UN Secretary General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to AUD 15 million annually. The PBF is the UN's leading instrument to invest in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This was part of a ministerially agreed multilateral peacebuilding step-up. The step-up also supported a range of new activities including a new partnership with the UN Institute for Training and Research to build capacity in preventative diplomacy, and funded the UN's highest level conflict prevention planning and strategy retreat.

Pivoting programs or reprioritising funding comes with challenges. DFAT continues to evolve its systems, including funding mechanisms and contracts, to ensure we have the agility to respond to emerging opportunities and evolving partner priorities.

15. What does resilience and inclusive development for conflict prevention look like?

Australia's approach to resilience and inclusive development for conflict prevention is guided by our International Development Policy, Humanitarian Policy, International Gender Equality Strategy, International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy, and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2021-2031). Australia recognises that women's leadership, participation in decision-making, and access to justice, services and livelihoods are critical to durable peace. Disability equity contributes to inclusive and resilient societies, supporting long-term regional peace, stability and prosperity. Examples of Australia's approach to resilience and inclusive development for conflict prevention include:

- Support for the Pacific Women Mediators Network to strengthen Pacific women's participation and leadership in international policy forums and inform inclusive approaches to conflict prevention, climate resilience, and development in our region.

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- Investing in UN Women's Regional Framework Towards Peaceful, Inclusive Societies, which supports Asia-Pacific governments to develop and implement Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans, promoting inclusive development and governance for conflict prevention.
- Working through Australia Assists to deploy Australian specialists on issues like disaster risk reduction, gender equality and peacebuilding into UN agencies and partner governments.

16. What types of current programs and investments do you identify as delivering these savings most consistently?

As outlined in DFAT's submission to the inquiry, preventing crises through early investment in resilience and inclusive development is far more cost effective than post-conflict humanitarian response and reconstruction. Evidence shows that investing early in inclusive development and resilience reduces the need for costly response, military intervention and reconstruction support. International Monetary Fund (IMF) analysis suggests that every dollar invested in development activities that spur economic growth and political stability can avert spending of between USD26-103 in possible future conflict-related costs.

By supporting inclusive development in health and education, economic and political participation, addressing inequalities, and promoting good governance, Australia's country programs help shore up the foundations of peace, prosperity and stability in our region. Our bilateral programs support targeted conflict and peace initiatives which help citizens and governments navigate differences peacefully and equitably, and support communities to enhance their human and natural resources so they are resilient to pressures and shocks.

For example, in the Philippines, Australia's Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Mindanao Phase 2 investment delivers targeted support to the peace process, builds stronger and more inclusive governance institutions, and provides economic empowerment which contribute to the prevention of conflict and violent extremism. Through our Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, Australia played an active role in the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR). The PBAR resolutions emphasise the value of conflict prevention and inclusive peacebuilding. The resolutions commit to strengthening UN system wide coherence, enhancing the Peacebuilding Commission's (PBC) role and increasing peacebuilding financing. Australia's *Humanitarian Policy* also prioritises building readiness and preparedness to support governments and communities to lessen the impact of crises.

17. What areas can you identify that should be the target for a shift towards early investment?

DPPs identify where Australia will prioritise early investment, and how investments are expected to evolve over time. For example, a key objective of the Philippines DPP is enhancing conditions for stability, in support of the goal to support a stable, prosperous and resilient Philippines. With peacebuilding a focus area for cooperation, Australia is partnering with the Philippines to address underlying drivers of instability and support effective, accountable institutions that will underpin economic and social development in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. This includes working towards reduced clan conflict ('rido') through mediation and dispute resolution, stronger early warning systems, and boosted community resilience, including against climate- and disaster-induced displacement and migration.

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As above, mid-cycle reviews of DPPs will be an opportunity to test strategic assumptions and approaches, and update conflict-risk assessments and other relevant analysis, to enable further program adaptation as needed.

18. Can you give an example from the Indo-Pacific where early investment demonstrably prevented escalation, and what made that program work?

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.

The success of this program is underpinned by Australia's commitment to locally led development, particularly working with women-led groups.

19. How does DFAT currently conduct conflict analysis?

a. What can be improved?

Conflict prevention underpins Australia's International Development Policy, with its overarching objective of advancing a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. DFAT maintains fit-for-purpose business processes to enable the development program to deliver against these policy objectives, including processes to support the use of conflict and other analysis to inform strategic planning, investment design, program implementation and performance assessment (see [International Development Programming Guide](#)).

A wide range of internal and external reporting, real-time program performance information, reviews and evaluations inform DFAT's analysis. This includes drawing on information from, for example, the International Crisis Group, the Lowy Institute, The Asia Foundation, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) and the ANU Security College, and on information and analysis from Australian government agencies and sources, for example the Office of National Intelligence.

Australia is also making global contributions to expanding the use of conflict analysis. As part of our term on the UN Peacebuilding Commission, Australia is developing policy guidance on preparing National Prevention Strategies (with our partner the New York University Centre on International Cooperation). This guidance is expected to be released in June 2026 and will include a focus on national conflict analyses.

Please refer to questions 32, 33 and 34 for further information on DFAT's analytical tools and approaches.

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COOPERATION WITH COMMUNITY AND CIVIC GROUPS

20. How does external advice feed into conflict prevention without a formal conflict prevention framework?

a. What does that dialogue with non-government organisations currently look like in practice, and how often does it happen?

DFAT has a range of mechanisms for engaging with external stakeholders across foreign policy, trade and development domains. For example, the Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch engages with thinktanks and academics through roundtables, briefings, workshops, presentations, and conferences on diverse aspects of the conflict prevention agenda. This entails frequent informal dialogue with thinktanks and academics on specific issues relating to conflict prevention in the Indo-Pacific, as well as more formal engagement with thinktanks that provide analysis to inform DFAT's work and also facilitate track 1.5 engagements with regional partner countries. Through the development program, we have partnerships with organisations with expertise in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, like the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and The Asia Foundation. We engage with these partners bilaterally at our relevant Posts, and also at a central level.

We also have regular, formal dialogue with non-government organisations, for example through annual Secretary-level meetings with the board of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and regular dialogue with AHP on emerging crises or situations. Posts also engage regularly with NGOs in country, and we continue to support partnerships with local NGOs.

21. How does the department incorporate advice and feedback from NGOs on the ground in conflict prevention settings?

Australia's development and humanitarian policies recognise that local communities and leaders are best placed to identify challenges and solutions to localised conflict dynamics. Both policies commit Australia to support local leadership and decision-making wherever and as appropriate, and invest in the capability and capacity of local actors. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) incorporates advice and feedback from NGOs, working closely with local communities, through a variety of formal and informal mechanisms to inform its policy and program development.

For example, the department is working with civil society to inform the new Civil Society Partnerships Fund which will support and expand civic space across the Indo-Pacific.

The Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), our longest running and largest NGO program (AUD143 million in 2024-2025), annually supports more than 60 Australian NGOs to work with more than 2,000 local partners to deliver community-based support. Some ANCP programs directly supporting community-based conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership, DFAT funds Australian NGO partners to work in conflict settings and receives ongoing feedback during implementation to inform policy decisions.

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DIASPORA

22. How does DFAT integrate views from diaspora groups in conflict prevention efforts?

22a. What more can be done to integrate community and diaspora views and expertise for conflict prevention?

DFAT engages regularly with civil society, including diaspora groups, on development and humanitarian priorities. Engagement includes consideration of crisis response and coordination as this is relevant to country and regional programs.

For example, DFAT meets with representatives of Myanmar diaspora and community groups in Australia, including during the program design process. Representatives were consulted on the preparation of the Australia-Myanmar Development Partnership Plan, and as part of the design for our new humanitarian investment.

While engaging with diaspora on conflict issues can carry sensitivities and must be fit-for-purpose, we recognise the value of this engagement to development cooperation and continue to look for opportunities to strengthen systems of consultation.

HUMANITARIAN PERSONNEL AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

23. In DFAT's submission DFAT talks about how Australia can build on its global leadership in protecting humanitarian personnel by advancing regional adherence to international humanitarian and human rights laws. In what ways can Australia do more to advance this regional adherence?

Building on our leadership in developing the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel (the Declaration) and our role as co-chair of the Group of Friends of the Declaration, Australia is championing global norms and practical measures to reduce risks to humanitarian workers (local and international) and accountability for incidents. We also worked closely with Indonesia and Japan, both of whom were members of the Ministerial Group that led the development and delivery of the Declaration. To further advance regional adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law, Australia works bilaterally and in multilateral fora to promote awareness of the legal frameworks protecting civilians and humanitarian personnel in situations of armed conflict, including by encouraging endorsement of the Declaration, particularly by Indo-Pacific partners.

There is strong complementarity between our leadership of the Declaration and Australia's leadership and support for the ICRC's Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment for International Humanitarian Law (the Global Initiative). Australia co-chairs one of seven workstreams in the Global Initiative, and plays a role in consultations across other work streams, to help develop recommendations for the global community.

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24. Are there specific forums or mechanisms that aren't being properly utilised?

We are exploring all relevant avenues through which to promote the Declaration internationally. Since its launch, Australia has consistently raised protection of humanitarian workers in multilateral and regional forums, including through advocacy in UN fora, CHOGM processes, MIKTA meetings, and via specific partner governance mechanisms (e.g. UNHCR Executive Committee, OCHA Donor Support Group, WFP Advisory Board) and with regional partners.

Domestically, DFAT engages with government agencies and departments, leverages existing mechanisms such as the National International Humanitarian Law Committee, and holds targeted, ad hoc discussions on the Declaration with NGOs and civil society.

Australia will continue to use our diplomacy, partnerships, and engagements across a range of forums and mechanisms to promote respect for humanitarian principles and ensure that those who protect others can do their work safely.

25. When humanitarian workers are harmed or obstructed in the Indo-Pacific, what practical steps does Australia currently take, and are those steps sufficient?

Australia can employ a range of approaches when humanitarian workers are harmed or obstructed in the Indo-Pacific. The Declaration and its global support now provides an impetus to generate action in response to incidents. Approaches include:

- Diplomatic advocacy: Australian Missions can raise incidents with partner governments to urge safe, unhindered humanitarian access and protection of humanitarian personnel.
- Bilateral public statements: Australia also uses bilateral public statements to reaffirm the importance of safe, predictable humanitarian access and to highlight the essential role of humanitarian personnel in partner countries' response and recovery efforts.
- Multilateral engagement: Australia works through the Geneva based Group of Friends for the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel (established in December 2025), which Australia co-chairs, to coordinate collective advocacy and promote practical measures to facilitate humanitarian operations. For example, the Group of Friends recently delivered a statement at the Human Rights Council advocating for better protection of humanitarian workers. Australia also consistently reinforces the protection of humanitarian personnel through UN processes and fora, and other state multilateral, regional, and donor platforms (e.g., ASEAN, CHOGM, MIKTA), as well as civil society fora.
- Consular support: Where Australian citizens are affected, Australia provides consular assistance in line with the Consular Services Charter.
- Coordination with humanitarian delivery partners: Australia works with the UN, Red Cross Movement and NGOs to understand incidents, address immediate protection needs and to seek to restore access, as well as to support efforts to document and pursue accountability.
- Data and evidence: We fund the Aid Worker Security Database, managed by Humanitarian Outcomes (an INGO), as part of a package of initiatives to support the Declaration. The AWSD

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collects and verifies evidence of incidents of harm to humanitarian workers in order to raise awareness and support norms, practical response and accountability.

- Accountability: Australia funds Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) to undertake legal action pursuing accountability and seek redress where violations against aid workers have occurred.

26. Is Australia's voice on international humanitarian law more effective when taken bilaterally with individual countries, or through multilateral forums? What does the evidence suggest?

Australia uses both bilateral engagements and multilateral fora to pursue advocacy on international humanitarian law (IHL) issues – these efforts are complementary and reinforcing. Bilateral engagement allows for confidential and tailored, context-specific representations. Multilateral engagement can amplify Australia's voice, set global expectations and mobilise collective action.

For example, Australia's leadership on the Declaration and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law our commitment to building coalitions to strengthen prevention and protection norms. The 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, last held in October 2024, is another example of how Australia can work with the global community to reinforce commitment to upholding IHL. In that context, Australia engaged with the Conference to generate support for the Declaration and contributed to five resolutions adopted by consensus, including on compliance with IHL and civilian protection in cyberspace.

Australia pursues both thematic and issue-specific IHL advocacy, and we consider on a case-by-case basis the most effective advocacy strategy on any given issue. It is common for multilateral and plurilateral IHL advocacy to be reinforced through bilateral dialogue, and vice versa. For example, while the Declaration was a multilateral initiative, bilateral discussions were crucial to galvanise political support and build momentum to encourage widespread endorsement of the Declaration.

FUNDING FLEXIBILITY

27. Does the department build in funding flexibility in its aid programs? If so, how?

Yes—Australia builds flexibility into its development and humanitarian programming. This occurs at both portfolio and investment levels through forward pipeline planning and program governance arrangements, as well as through investment design processes and agreement management. By building in flexibility at all levels, our programs are able to adapt in response to evolving operating contexts and emerging priorities in the short term, whilst maintaining our focus on medium-to-long term objectives. For example, our humanitarian program uses arrangements that allow partners to re-prioritise activities and budgets as needs change, within agreed parameters. We also retain flexibility through the Humanitarian Emergency Fund contingency mechanism (currently AUD150 million annually) and contribute to multi-donor pooled funds that can quickly and flexibly respond to needs on the ground.

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28. What information/communication with humanitarian groups would the Department need to in real time assess whether these changes align with the core aims of the funding?

The Department would need rapid reporting on what is changing (activities/budget), why it is changing (needs and risk), and how the change still delivers the agreed objectives and target populations.

This can be supported through in-country engagement and formal governance (e.g. agreed notification thresholds, variation requests, and scheduled check-ins) to provide timely updates and maintain oversight, including for country-level appeals.

29. What would a flexible funding system look like? What would be the drawbacks of a system with an easing of restrictions for the allocation of funding?

Flexible funding mechanisms are a part of Australia's development program. For example, we use a range of instruments to respond to humanitarian crises that are designed to balance the need for rapid, adaptive responses, with appropriate risk management and safeguards in high-risk contexts. This includes:

- Strategic Partnership Agreements with multilateral and Red Cross partners that provide flexible core funding, and flexible country-level funding to humanitarian appeals, which reduce administrative delays to supporting urgent operations.
- The Australian Humanitarian Partnership, which has established partnerships with ANGOs, provides flexible funding for rapid onset disasters, crucial in fragile settings, while also maintaining due diligence requirements through established frameworks.
- The Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF) as a standing contingency mechanism within Australia's development budget to respond to rapid onset and deteriorating crises.

30. Are there existing examples — either within Australia's aid program or from comparable donor countries — where flexible funding has been successfully implemented without a loss of accountability?

Australia provides flexible humanitarian funding (as described above) while maintaining rigorous performance and accountability including through partnership agreements, due diligence processes, and regular performance assessments.

A practical example in our region of the rapid use of flexible funding occurred in 2017, when humanitarian agencies such as WFP, UNHCR and OCHA used flexible funding to establish what became the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. This enabled agencies to respond quickly to accommodate the influx of around 700,000 Rohingya refugees. This would not have been possible in the absence of flexible funding.

31. How does the department currently handle situations where a program needs to pivot quickly due to a sudden escalation in conflict? Is the existing system fast enough?

The Department typically uses flexible humanitarian funding instruments that have been designed to respond quickly to new and deteriorating crises. This includes:

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- The provision of core funding that is used by humanitarian agencies to initiate or scale up responses to crises
- Pre-positioned funding that can be released in response to sudden onset conflict, such as the UN Central Emergency Response Fund and the IFRC's Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF).
- Flexible country-level humanitarian funding that can be reallocated by partners to meet new and emerging needs.

The HEF provides Ministers with discretion to allocate funding to urgent humanitarian priorities over a financial year.

Overall, the system is fast where flexible instruments are already in place, but speed may be constrained when new approvals, new partners, or additional assurance is required. DFAT also faces real pressures in managing staff resources to respond to the sustained deterioration in the strategic environment.

Please also refer to Question 27 for information on program flexibility.

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

32. What current tools are used to measure the success of conflict prevention techniques?

Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA)-funded conflict prevention initiatives are evaluated through a structured, whole-of-development program performance system, guided by Australia's International Development Policy and associated Performance and Delivery Framework (see [Australia's International Development Performance and Delivery Framework](#) and [Development Evaluation Policy](#)). The annual Performance of Australian Development Cooperation (PADC) Report collates learning and evidence from Australia's development cooperation to track and measure impact and performance of the program over time. At the level of individual investments, performance ratings and case studies on results achieved are available through the online resource AusDevPortal.

Please refer to questions 33 and 34 for further information on tools and approaches.

33. During key planning, design, and monitoring processes, what data is being used to understand conflict risks and how are development programs adapted to address various conflict risks effectively?

Australia's International Development Policy and associated Performance and Delivery Framework drive DFAT's implementation of an efficient and effective development program. These policy settings are supported by business processes and delivery models that enable DFAT to be responsive to changing operating contexts and risks (see [International Development Programming Guide](#)).

Data to inform planning, design, implementation and monitoring of Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) are drawn from a wide range of internal and external reporting, real-time program performance information, reviews and evaluations. At the country and regional level, Development Partnership Plans (DPPs) articulate shared priorities negotiated with our partners and are based on analysis of risks (including conflict risks as relevant) and opportunities in the particular country or regional context.

At the investment level, risk management processes embedded throughout the program management cycle enable DFAT to identify and address risks, including by adapting specific program design and delivery approaches as required. As noted above, mid-cycle reviews of DPPs will be an opportunity to test

strategic assumptions and approaches, and update conflict-risk assessments, to enable further program adaptation as needed.

34. Are there international models that Australia could draw on to properly evaluate these conflict prevention initiatives?

Australia's ODA-funded initiatives, including those that contribute to conflict prevention, are evaluated through a structured, whole-of-development program performance system which is comparable to those of like-minded development partners (see [Australia's International Development Performance and Delivery Framework](#) and [Development Evaluation Policy](#)). Where relevant, Australia also draws on other examples of international good practice for development program evaluations, such as those provided by the OECD Development Assistance Committee and multilateral partners, to complement Australia's Development Performance and Delivery Framework and inform our decision-making processes in specific contexts.