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Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

Topic: FADT References Committee - Democracy and Human Rights in Myanmar - Spoken QoN - Public Hearing
13Feb26

Senator David Shoebridge

Question

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Given the time, could I ask you to respond on notice in more detail to the positions put by the Myanmar Research Centre and, in particular, Australian Baptist Ministries about the delivery of aid through non-state actors and reviewing some of the due diligence restrictions to ensure the aid is getting where it's needed.

Could I also ask you to respond on notice to the question of increased aid to displaced persons, particularly in the massive Cox's Bazar refugee camps, as well as the refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border—could you respond about the level of aid and whether or not Australia is intending to meet some of the gap that's caused as a result of US aid being withdrawn. Could you answer those things on notice.

Mr Zurbrugg: Yes, we can take that on notice.

Answer

Australia delivers development and humanitarian assistance in Myanmar through a combination of United Nations agencies, multilateral and regional partners, managing contractors, international and local NGOs, and local community organisations. In many cases, our larger partners work with smaller, local downstream organisations, including civil society groups. This consolidation allows for the efficient delivery of Australian assistance to vulnerable communities across the country. Australian development assistance reaches every state in Myanmar.

Australia's development and humanitarian partners have rigorous processes in place to ensure that funding is delivered appropriately and to intended beneficiaries. DFAT's Due Diligence Framework is part of its broader risk management approach, applying a structured and consistent methodology to review a potential partner's ability to deliver services in line with the policy requirements of the Australian aid program. The Due Diligence Framework assists financial delegates to satisfy Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 requirements to discharge their duties with the degree of care and diligence a reasonable person would exercise. DFAT assessed the efficacy of its Due Diligence Framework following the Senate References Committee's report in December 2023, and found it was appropriate and fit for purpose in Myanmar.

Since 2017, Australia has committed \$1.26 billion in humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar, displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh and their host communities. This assistance also covers displaced communities on both sides of the Thai-Myanmar border. This is Australia's largest ongoing humanitarian response, to what is the most complex crisis in our region.

Funding reductions by other donors have created funding shortfalls across Myanmar and in refugee camps in Bangladesh and Thailand. The Australian Government has responded to these developments by ensuring more of Australia's development assistance goes to Southeast Asia and the Pacific, where Australia's interests are most at stake. The Australian Government now dedicate 75 cents of every Australian development dollar to the Indo-Pacific region. We have also used the flexibility that exists in existing programs to pivot and reprioritise, ensuring we respond to the most acute needs, including in Cox's Bazar and on the Thai-Myanmar border. We will continue to provide this assistance, including through a new three-year program of \$370 million focused on delivering humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar, displaced Rohingya living in Bangladesh and their host communities.