

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By email only: jscfadt@aph.gov.au

12 June 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission on Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Aid 2018

Mary Ward International Australia is an aid and development agency supporting the development works of the Loreto Sisters and their colleagues as they engage, particularly with women, to transform structures and systems that keep them oppressed and marginalised. MWIA provides funding and volunteers for projects in countries such as India, Kenya, South Sudan, Peru and Australia. We have a particularly significant involvement in providing education, community development and further engagement in Timor-Leste.

Mary Ward International Australia is deeply committed to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and through the Loreto Schools is educating students about the SDGs and their potential for eradicating global poverty. In a previous submission to the Senate Inquiry into the SDGs we lamented the lack of information around the SDGs in Australia, the minimal efforts to engage civil society and the cutting, followed by the freezing, of overseas aid. Cutting overseas aid to its lowest level, 0.22%, at a time of greater prosperity in Australia is hardly indicative of a commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.

MWIA acknowledges the strategic importance of overseas aid but suggests that this should not be the overarching reason for giving aid. The fundamental reason for a wealthy country, such as Australia, to provide aid should be the alleviation of poverty – hence the SDGs. While there is no doubt that poverty exists in the Pacific the considerable increase in aid, currently at \$1.3 billion, to the region is more an indication of a need to maintain our dominance as a donor in the face of China's increasing engagement, rather than a primary response to poverty. The shift of aid to the Pacific has been at the expense of Africa, the Middle East and our near neighbour, Indonesia. The former two regions are experiencing extreme poverty in so many countries.

The second reason for overseas aid is the promotion of peace and stability through education, and the development of health, agriculture, employment and other services. From this perspective there is some justification for Australia's increased aid to the Pacific region until we see that Australia has just established a \$3.8 billion loan scheme to increase Australia's position as a global supplier of military weapons. We provide the ground work for peace on the one hand and take it away with a weapon on the other hand.

Australia's position in regard to overseas aid is lamentable – the lowest provider in the list of OECD countries – a fall from the 2012-13 level of \$5 billion to \$3.9 billion and a marked contrast to our neighbour New Zealand which has just increased its aid by 30%. Unfortunately, it seems that Australia's overseas aid is on a downward trajectory.

Mary Ward International Australia urges the government to take seriously its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, to the need to develop peace and security in the world and

return our overseas aid to levels which indicate the generosity and compassion which we are capable of.



Mary Ward International Australia