

Changing how we deliver our development assistance

by Pat Conroy

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Minister Pat Conroy at the Development Policy Forum

Photo Credit: Development Policy Centre

This is an edited transcript of the speech delivered by Pat Conroy, Minister for International Development and the Pacific, at the Development Policy Forum at the Australian National University, Canberra on 12 September.

I wish to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional owners of the land on which we gather, and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region.

I acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the Albanese Government's commitment to implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full. I will speak a little more about our new policy in a moment, but I want to quickly ask you to think about the principles we have embedded in the policy of:

- respectful listening
- acting on partner priorities and
- working in genuine partnership with governments and communities across our region.

I see some incredibly strong parallels between what we are seeking to do through the referendum and what we are seeking to do with our partners across the region.

I think it's a fair assumption to make that you all have a deep-seated interest in international development because you are driven by principles of justice, equity and decency. And so in this spirit, I encourage you to reach out across your networks of friends and family and talk with everyone you know about why it will be so important to vote Yes on 14 October. Those individual conversations are how we will win this referendum. I can't urge you enough to be a part of those discussions and I know many of you are.

With that, let's dive into today's discussions.

Can I begin my remarks today by saying: thank you.

Thank you for your work in helping create Australia's **new development policy**. We could not have achieved what we have without you, our valued stakeholders. You are our indispensable partners, our on-the-ground enablers, our most impassioned allies, as well as – quite rightly when the occasion calls for it – our most frank and fearless critics.

This new policy is a product of those open and constructive discussions we've held with all of you in our first year of government. We ran a consultation process that received over 200 written submissions, surveyed 100 domestic and regional experts, held over 20 roundtables across Australia in which hundreds of people participated, and consulted extensively with countries in our region.

We heard you, and I hope you can see how the new policy reflects your perspectives and concerns. So, I say again: thank you for your contribution.

Australia's new development policy has clear commitments on the issues that you told us were important. Issues like climate change, locally led development, transparency, and development capability.

We are on a journey to re-build our development program into one which works better to:

- improve the lives of people in our developing country partners
- advance our mutual interests in a peaceful and prosperous region, and
- embody Australia's values and reflect who we are.

Those are the three underlying principles that will drive our entire policy work. The new policy will underpin the Government's record international development investments – \$1.7 billion in new spending over five years and a commitment to long-term growth. We are committed to delivering a high-quality development program that makes a real difference. We want this policy to stand the test of time.

The new commitments announced in the policy matter. They are about changing how Australia delivers development, including:

- a refreshed approach to country and regional planning
- backing locally led development, including through a new Civil Society Partnerships Fund
- a renewed focus on climate change and gender equality
- implementing the recommendations of the Development Finance Review

- enhanced transparency and accountability, and
- stronger monitoring, evaluation and learning.

I've told the DFAT team that the real test of the policy will be how it is translated into practice. How we turn these commitments into tangible outcomes. I had a great morning tea with the DFAT team that drove the policy. While I thanked them for their work, I told them the hard work begins now.

That's why today I want to speak about how we approach implementation. And when I say 'we' here, I mean 'we' to include everybody in this room, and those of you attending online. Because in my view, successful implementation of transformative policy calls for a whole-of-country approach. Government needs our partners across academia, not-for-profit and the private sector if we are to make a difference.

As I said in my remarks at the launch last month, I like to describe our approach to development assistance in five ways:

- it is based on the priorities of our partners
- it is not transactional
- we are transparent
- we use every opportunity to drive local employment, procurement and skills development, and
- we make a high-quality offering.

All of this is central to the implementation of this new policy. During DFAT's consultations many of you told us that 'the how' was equally, if not more important, than 'the what'. We heard you.

A key difference between this policy and what has come before is its focus on changing how we will deliver development assistance. Australia will offer genuine partnerships based on respect, listening and learning from each other. Pursuing locally led development is a powerful means to strengthen both our impact and our partners' capability.

Development Partnership Plans (DPPs) will be a core element in translating the new policy into action. My expectation is that the DPPs will involve deep and broad engagement with partners and across government. Consultations should focus on how we work together as partners as much as what we will work on together. DPPs will reflect the strengths we have to offer and the things that set us apart.

We recognise that there is no 'one size fits all' solution to development in our region. DPPs will reflect careful choices, informed by consultation, about how to focus our

efforts to make a greater impact.

When it comes to Australia's development program, we are right to be ambitious. Today's Development Policy Forum is a unique opportunity to consider how we can take advantage of Australia's new policy – to match our ambition with action. Because Government doesn't have all the answers, nor should we ever pretend we do, I want to pose three challenges for this Forum to consider.

Challenge one: how can we work together to approach local partnerships differently? What new bridges do we need to build to achieve genuine partnerships, recognising that while our local partners may have different values, knowledge and expertise, effective partnerships and two-way learning are central to success? I'm particularly interested in your views on partnering approaches that have worked to build the capabilities of local actors and reduce transaction costs – while managing the risks.

Challenge two: how do we make difficult choices about where to prioritise our efforts for the greatest impact? Is there a way we can better integrate the many strands to development effectiveness without overwhelming local partners?

Challenge three: how will we know where there is most potential to improve in what we do? For example, can we collectively be more frank and inclusive in the way we learn and share our learning? How can we create a culture in the sector that rewards transparency? That is more willing to learn from failure and share lessons about what could be done better?

Mistakes will be made but the critical thing is that we learn from them and improve our policy. I can't wait to see what comes out of today's forum. These forums are critical. I'll be frank with you. When I was a shadow minister, attending these forums was a great way of stealing ideas. So I look forward to many more ideas that I can adopt or steal or imitate. Only by working together can we improve on our development policy and deliver on those three core principles I talked about earlier, improving the lives of our neighbours and friends, lifting them out of poverty, acting on their priorities and providing practical manifestations of who we are and the values that Australia holds dear.

Read [the official transcript of Minister Conroy's speech](#) and [the transcript of the Question and Answer session](#). [Watch a video of the session](#).

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The Hon Pat Conroy MP is the Australian Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

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