

Labor will rebuild Australia's international development program

by Pat Conroy

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Shadow Minister for International Development and the Pacific Pat Conroy, MP, speaking at ANU on 9 May 2022

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Labor's international development policies will help re-establish Australia as a partner of choice for countries in our region in meeting economic, development, climate and security challenges. These policies will also rebuild our international development program and ensure that Australia pulls its weight in tackling the challenges faced by developing nations around the world.

This isn't just the right thing to do from a humanitarian perspective, but as evidenced by the security pact recently signed between China and the Solomon Islands, it is clear that nearly a decade of successive cuts to Australia's aid program are leaving a vacuum for others to fill, which has strategic implications for our region and for our own security.

Labor's foreign policy is founded on the belief that we deal with the world as it is and we seek to change it for the better. This means a foreign policy that is not transactional, but purposive.

There will be no greater example of this than our approach to international development. Our approach will be driven by goals defined by our values, interests and identity. Those values are of fairness, equality and compassion.

Our primary interest must always be the security and prosperity of the nation and our people, in conjunction with our deep and abiding commitment to a stable, prosperous and peaceful region anchored in the rule of law where public goods that give form to our values are preserved and defended.

We must do this in the context of the confronting changes in the balance of economic and strategic power, economic and social inequality, rising nationalism and challenges to the liberal rules-based order that are reshaping our world.

That's why Labor has been so concerned about the Coalition Government's cuts to

Australia's foreign aid budget totalling more than \$11.8 billion since 2013. Under Scott Morrison's watch, Australia's official development assistance (ODA) has fallen to a record low as a share of national income.

Labor's plan to rebuild Australia's international development program is a key part of our commitment to a strong and principled approach to national security and a self-reliant and ambitious foreign policy.

Our plan will focus Australian ODA expenditure in the following areas:

- poverty reduction
- equitable access to quality health and education services
- economic development and infrastructure investment
- climate change and environmental sustainability
- sustainable agriculture, forest and fisheries management, and food security
- water, sanitation and hygiene
- good governance
- global humanitarian crises and the root causes of crisis, conflict, instability and insecurity
- empowerment of people with disabilities, and
- gender equality and empowerment of women and girls as a key objective, including ensuring at least 80 per cent of Australia's aid investments address gender issues and tackle violence against women and children.

We have already announced that a Labor Government will increase Australia's ODA to the Pacific by \$525 million over the next four years.

This funding is additional to the existing ODA budget, including the supplemental ODA funding announced in the Federal Budget earlier this year.

Our Pacific Policy is an example of the multidimensional approach we will take to securing our region. It was designed to support the development and security goals of our Pacific friends. It includes:

- restoring Australia's climate leadership as well as listening and acting on Pacific Island warnings of the existential threat of climate change by establishing a **Pacific Climate Infrastructure Financing Partnership**, and bidding to co-host a future Conference of the Parties in Australia with our Pacific partners
- delivering an **Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy** that boosts Australian public and commercial media content to audiences in our region, increases training for Pacific journalists and enhances partnerships with broadcasters in our region
- establishing a **new Australia-Pacific Defence School** to provide training for members of defence and security forces from Pacific Island nations

- doubling **Australia's funding for the Pacific Maritime Security Program** to help Pacific governments recoup some of the US\$150 million a year in revenues which are estimated to be lost due to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing
- reinstating **regular bipartisan Parliamentary Pacific visits** to demonstrate to the Pacific family that stronger Pacific partnerships are in Australia's national interest
- addressing Pacific economic challenges and easing Australia's agricultural worker shortages by **reforming the Seasonal Worker Program** and **expanding the Pacific Labour Scheme**, and
- boosting our people-to-people links across the Pacific family by encouraging more Pacific permanent migration to Australia through a **new Pacific Engagement Visa**.

These policies use the power of Australia's proximity, as well as our strong cultural and family ties with the countries of the Pacific, to our shared benefit.

There is no greater challenge for the Pacific, and in fact all developing nations, than climate change. The 2018 Boe Declaration categorically stated that climate change is "the single greatest threat to the livelihood, security and well-being of Pacific people".

Yet the Coalition Government's refusal to take climate change seriously has been a slap in the face to our Pacific neighbours that they like to call family. Who needs family if they blatantly disregard an issue you see as your greatest threat? An Albanese Labor Government would take serious, meaningful action on climate change. Only Labor will ensure Australia is a trusted partner and a true member of the Pacific family.

An Albanese Labor Government will rebuild Australia's international development program by boosting funding, improving capabilities in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, working with Australian aid NGOs and contractors, and improving transparency and accountability in the aid program. An Albanese Labor Government will focus on working with the DFAT to build development capability and ensure it is prioritised and valued.

We want to rebuild and reward aid and development skills within the Department. We would expect graduates to be trained in the basics of aid design and management just as they are trained in the basics of the Department's other areas of work. We will be keen to see experience in development roles within the Department being highly prized for career progression. Development postings should be seen as good, if not critical, for career progression.

Labor also understands and appreciates the invaluable work of Australia's aid NGOs, and an Albanese Labor Government will increase the Australian NGO

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Cooperation Program (ANCP) funding by \$32 million over four years. The ANCP provides funding to accredited Australian charities and NGOs for projects to help people in developing countries with healthcare, education, preventing violence against women and children and tackling hunger and deprivation.

We also recognise the vital role development contractors play. Labor will not get bogged down in sectarian arguments regarding aid delivery. We will partner with everyone who is committed to lifting the world out of poverty.

I am very excited about a future Labor Government working to develop new forms of development finance to complement Australia's ODA. There is considerable interest globally in innovative approaches to development finance including guarantees for investments in development projects, provision of insurance and/or first loss cover and equity stakes in development projects. These are seen as having the potential to boost the effectiveness of grant funding by leveraging investment in development from the private sector, financial institutions and multilateral institutions. Australia must help shape these opportunities. Accordingly, Labor will establish a DFAT-led review to examine new forms of development finance and develop policy options for consideration in government.

Australia's aid program is a key pillar of our international engagement and enables our ability to build a region that is stable, prosperous, respectful of sovereignty and resilient to threats. It not only delivers life-saving assistance, but directly supports our foreign and defence policies to deepen Australia's partnerships in the region, restore Australian leadership and credibility, shape our region in our interests and counter behaviour that is against our interests.

Labor's plan to rebuild Australia's international development program is a key part of our commitment to a strong and principled approach to national security and a self-reliant and ambitious foreign policy.

Labor's international development program will speak to who we are, the confidence we have in ourselves, the values we believe in and to the region and world we want to live in.

Pat Conroy MP discussed the Australian Labor Party's aid and development policies at an [International Development Election Forum](#) on 9 May 2022. [Watch the event recording](#) and [read his full speech](#).

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Link:

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