

The Coalition's approach to international development

by Zed Seselja

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Minister for International Development and the Pacific Zed Seselja and moderator Louise Maher at ANU on 13 May 2022

Photo Credit: Devpol

This is an edited extract from the speech delivered by Senator Zed Seselja, Minister for International Development and the Pacific, to the International Development Election Forum at the Australian National University on Friday 13 May.

Partnerships for Recovery has been a critical strategy guiding the Government's approach to international development.

The Coalition is focused on results, not rhetoric.

We have delivered record levels of development assistance to the Pacific and Timor-Leste. Our COVID-19 temporary and targeted initiatives, combined with our \$1.5 billion loan to Indonesia, is Australia's largest investment in Southeast Asia since the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004.

We are ensuring Australia's development program is part of an integrated foreign policy toolkit. Our development program supports human development *and* international peace and stability. Because we cannot separate development and foreign aid from its broader context.

The development program is seen as an integral aspect of our foreign policy, *and* a crucial tool to make the world a better, more just and humane place. Our ODA [Official Development Assistance] budget is the central aspect of our development program. But it is not the only aspect of our development program.

The Coalition has ensured Australia is utilising the full suite of government capabilities to support development efforts in the region. Our non-ODA assets – from defence cooperation, to labour mobility, to diplomacy, to economic cooperation – are making critical contributions to the Coalition's integrated development and foreign policy efforts.

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The Coalition's approach to development is based on pursuing Australia's values and interests. As the Prime Minister has said, we have a moral *and* economic duty to support our neighbours. Our development program is making an important contribution to poverty alleviation, to helping the most marginalised, and to improving lives across our region.

We're ensuring that we concentrate on delivering quality in our development program. It is building human capital, through investing in health and education. It is addressing gender equality, by investing in programs which give women and girls the opportunities to realise their full potential. And it is also making an enormously important contribution to the security, stability and prosperity in our region.

Critically, the Coalition Government has recognised the fundamental change in our strategic circumstances, and is adapting our development program to suit. We have innovated, bringing new tools to support development outcomes. The Coalition has focussed our development program on the Indo-Pacific where we have a comparative advantage. And we continue to be good global citizens, in support of the international rules-based system.

Over nine years the Coalition has delivered a comprehensive whole of government development approach, including ODA, development finance, security cooperation, and climate investment, to respond to the region's needs and Australia's priorities.

We have delivered \$2.7 billion in bilateral loans to support Papua New Guinea and Indonesia to support them through COVID economic impacts. We'll spend \$1.85 billion in the coming year in ODA in the Pacific, but \$2.7 billion in total support to the Pacific, including our aid, security, health and financial support.

We have established the AIFFP [Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific] – now with \$3 billion in loan finance for critical economic infrastructure in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, backed by \$500 million in grant financing.

The Government has committed over \$900 million for 10 critical infrastructure Pacific projects. We have a pipeline of 22 projects across 11 countries valued at over \$2 billion.

We expanded Export Finance Australia's mandate to increase finance to the region. We are supporting Australian companies to invest in the Pacific, including Telstra's bid for Digicel Pacific.

We have delivered the Coral Sea Cable to PNG and Solomon Islands.

We're providing over \$1.1 billion in ODA and nearly 33 million vaccines to help our

region address COVID. Australia's funding has helped to ensure that the health crisis in our region hasn't turned into a destabilising economic or security crisis.

We've opened six new diplomatic posts (Marshall Islands; French Polynesia; Niue; Palau; Tuvalu; Cook Island) in the Pacific since 2018. Australia is the only country with diplomatic posts in every PIF [Pacific Islands Forum] country.

We have responded to emergencies and crises, through a mixture of ODA and non-ODA funding.

Australia was the first country Solomon Islands called upon when unrest began in November 2021. And Australia responded decisively to Tonga's requests for assistance following its recent volcanic eruption and tsunami.

We have responded immediately to Ukraine's humanitarian and defence needs with \$65m to protect women, children, and the elderly, including for food, shelter and emergency medical supplies, and \$225 million of military assistance.

We've procured a Pacific support vessel, capable of delivering both humanitarian and disaster relief missions, as needed across the Pacific. The \$2 billion Pacific Maritime Security Program has already delivered 14 out of 21 pledged Guardian-class patrol boats and upgraded wharf infrastructure across our region.

We've delivered the Australia Pacific Security College. We've established a Pacific Fusion Centre in Vanuatu. We've delivered Blackrock Humanitarian and Peacekeeping camp in Fiji. We're redeveloping Lombrum Naval Base in PNG.

In all these ways, the Morrison Government has stepped up. We've expanded the toolkit to support both development and stability. Our policy settings have predicted the more contested global environment and have meant Australia is well placed to respond.

On climate, we're delivering on our commitment of \$2 billion in climate finance between 2020 and 2025. This commitment will see at least \$700 million flowing to meet the Pacific's needs. Domestically, emissions are now 20% below 2005 levels and have fallen significantly faster than the OECD average.

A Coalition government will maintain a strong focus on security, stability and economic growth. We will continue to focus on results, not rhetoric.

We'll deliver real partnerships for our developing country partners and their people; and real value for the Australian taxpayer.

We will continue to focus on our region, while remaining a responsible global citizen.

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We will continue to take a serious moral stance on development issues. We will ensure the development program is directly addressing poverty alleviation and supporting the most marginalised in societies.

We'll build on Partnerships for Recovery, delivering further practical assistance in health security, economy recovery and stability. As Australia's geostrategic environment continues to shift, it will be appropriate for a new government to lay out a new approach.

We'll look to more fully integrate the development objectives of our ODA and non-ODA funding.

But our strategy will continue to be an expression of Australia's values and interests. And we will continue to prioritise genuine partnerships with countries across our region. And we will continue to prioritise using the ODA budget and other tools to continue to improve the lives of people in our region, while remaining a good global citizen.

The Coalition has navigated this country's development program through the greatest global disruption in decades. And we have a positive vision for how our development program can adapt and respond to the challenges of our times.

Read the full speech, or watch the event recording.

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/the-coalitions-approach-to-international-development-20220520/>