

Australian Baptist Ministries Submission to Australia's New International Development Policy



Australian Baptists

Australian Baptist Ministries is the trading name of The Baptist Union of Australia. The Baptist Union of Australia is a voluntary association of State Baptist Unions and is incorporated under the Australian Capital Territory Associations Incorporation Act 1991.

Australian Baptists are a multi-cultural and multi-generational movement of people serving communities in metropolitan, regional, coastal, rural and remote Australia through a network of 1,030 local churches. At the 2016 census, over 345,000 people listed their religious affiliation as Baptist. Australian Baptist Ministries is a federated organisation, partnering with local churches through State Baptist Union entities.

Global Relationships with Local Faith Communities

As a movement of local churches, we have strong global relationships of reciprocity and mutuality with local faith communities that are deeply embedded in their own contexts. In the 2016 National Church Life Survey, 72% of Baptist churches reported that they provide financial support for people in developing countries and many more individuals within these churches have similar relationships;¹ through Baptist World Aid Australia we partner with 42 local Christian organisations across 18 countries to see a world where poverty has ended; and as part of the Asia-Pacific Baptist Federation we are part of a network of over 33,000 local church congregations in 33 countries across the region. In many cases these relationships extend over generations; the relationship between Australian Baptists and the Baptists in Bangladesh extends back to the foundation of the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship over 100 years ago and remains strong today.

It is very often these local churches and faith communities that are the first responders when disasters occur, and in many contexts, it is these faith communities that carry the heavy burden of service delivery in health, education, and other social services. Faith communities also play an important role in fostering of local leadership capacity and influencing broader behavioural and attitudinal change.

Human Dignity and Development as Restored Relationships

Our Christian faith leads us to the fundamental conviction that every human being is created in the image of God, bearing inherent worth and dignity. God's intentions are for the emergence of a world where poverty has ended; a world filled with healthy, vibrant creatures living in safe, just, participatory, welcoming and equitable communities. This informs our understanding of development as the process by which people are able to experience fullness of life through restored relationships with each other, the earth, and with God.

A New International Development Policy Shaped by Values

As a movement of Australian Baptist churches, we believe that a new Australian International Development Policy should be focused on those most at risk of being left behind and reflect the values of generosity and reciprocity that motivate Australians to engage globally as good neighbours. It should be founded on:

Purpose: A new International Development Policy should be focused on improving the lives of the people and communities who are most vulnerable to poverty, injustice, or disaster.

¹ Sterland & Hancock, *Support for People in Developing Countries by Australian Churches in 2016*, NCLS Fact Sheet 17007, Sydney, NCLS Research.

As broader foreign policy objectives are considered, this should mean recognising that it both reflects Australia's values and is in our national interest to pursue:

- a. *Inclusive* prosperity that leaves no one behind – with particular investment in and focus on ensuring that opportunities reach people at risk of marginalisation including women, youth, people with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities;
- b. *Social* stability that is rooted in strong social capital in local communities, and an open civil society space that allows all people to actively participate and contribute to social, religious, political and economic life; and
- c. *Community* resilience that empowers families, communities and nations to be prepared and able to withstand shocks of conflict, economic instability, climate change and natural disaster.

Ambition: *Australia should engage the world with leadership and generosity.*

As one of the wealthiest nations in the world that takes pride in punching above its weight globally, and as a society that values being a good neighbour, a new International Development Policy should make ambitious and generous commitments. It should begin with a timetabled plan to grow Australia's investment in aid toward the internationally agreed target of 0.7% of GNI, and also include a commitment to using other instruments of legislation and foreign policy to improve the lives of vulnerable populations - for example through the continued implementation and future strengthening of the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act.

Reach: *Our international development commitments should be both to our immediate neighbours, and to those in greatest need wherever they may live.*

Australians have deep relationships with communities throughout the world, and recognise the continuing vulnerabilities faced by communities not only in our immediate neighbours, but also the broader Indo-Pacific region and throughout Africa and the Middle East. A new International Development Policy should maintain significant focus on our immediate region, on the most vulnerable communities in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and be ready to respond to humanitarian crises and global challenges like climate change, conflict and modern slavery.

Respect and reciprocity: *Australia's approach to international development should be founded on principles of partnership and reciprocity and give priority to local partners.*

A new International Development Policy and its implementation should recognise and respect the inherent dignity of the communities and nations with whom it partners and respond to the evidence in support of the effectiveness of greater localisation. Both in the design and implementation of aid programs and development initiatives, partnership and reciprocity should be foundational principles and preference should be given to ways of working that prioritise local partners.

Partnership: *The Development Program should engage with churches, faith leaders, and wider civil society as partners both overseas and here in Australia.*

Australia's international development efforts should be governed in ways that actively seek meaningful and ongoing consultation with key partners and engage the active interest and support of the Australian people. As a church – and along with other faith institutions – we have distinctive purposes and natures, but also a strong shared commitment to international cooperation that sees poverty and injustice ended. We suggest that a new International Development Policy should identify a process and mechanism to engage faith leaders and faith-based organisations in ongoing strategic dialogue to enable effective collaboration in realising impact for vulnerable communities, support for key programs and initiatives, and partnership in engaging with Australian communities.

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