



It starts with equal

## **Inquiry into Australia's Defence relationships with Pacific Island nations**

CARE Australia seeks a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and all people live with dignity and security. Formed in 1987 by former Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Malcolm Fraser, as a humanitarian aid organisation, and part of a global movement formed in 1945, CARE Australia has a strong focus on gender equality as an essential component in bringing lasting development to communities.

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The primary geographic focus of CARE Australia is the Pacific and South-East Asia where we manage all programs and activities of the CARE International confederation in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Tonga. In addition, CARE Australia undertakes development assistance and disaster response activities in another 17 countries in the Pacific, Middle East and Africa.

### **Recommendations**

*The voices and particular needs of women, and the implementation of the WPS agenda, are deliberately included in the Committee's deliberations.*

*DRR and HADR programs recognise and respond to the fundamental differences in how women and men prepare for and are affected by and recover from disasters. This includes*

- *integration of gender equality into the emergency preparedness planning process;*
- *designing emergency assistance to meet the practical needs of women and girls; and*
- *strengthening women's voice in humanitarian response, and resourcing the second Australian National Action Plan on WPS to deliver increased engagement with civil society*

### **The Women, Peace and Security Agenda**

The *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, adopted by Pacific Islander leaders, including Australia and New Zealand in September 2018, reiterates and recognises an expanded concept of security, with an increasing emphasis on four key areas, including 'human security, including humanitarian assistance, to protect the rights, health and prosperity of Pacific people.'<sup>1</sup> And this expanded understanding of security will benefit by the incorporation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The WPS agenda was first established twenty years ago with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325<sup>2</sup>, and has continued to evolve with the adoption of a further nine resolutions to the end of 2019. A WPS approach recognises the experiences and needs of women and girls differ from those

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<sup>1</sup> As referenced in CARE and IWDA *From Rhetoric to Reality: Towards a Feminist Foreign Policy* 2019

<sup>2</sup> <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/105>

of men and boys in conflict and post-conflict situations, and underlines the essential role of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.<sup>3</sup>

In considering Australia's defence relationship with the Pacific region CARE Australia recommends the voices and particular needs of women, and the implementation of the WPS agenda, are deliberately included. The Papua New Guinea Permanent Mission to the United Nations stated (during debate on sexual violence in 2013):

The unfortunate and sobering reality today is that women are still part of the battleground. They are marginalized, harassed, raped, abducted, humiliated, killed and forced to endure unwanted pregnancies, sexual abuse and slavery. Women are also still largely excluded from formal decision-making processes concerning peace and security.<sup>4</sup>

International peace operations often lack the mandate, capabilities and training for protection, and national security and justice institutions are often weak or even complicit in perpetrating violence. All too often international assistance on the ground is inadequately attuned to the protection needs of women and girls – reflecting a wider neglect of gender in humanitarian and recovery efforts. As noted by Agius and Mundkur there is an urgent need for a holistic approach to national security that better links foreign, defence, aid, and domestic policies and puts conflict prevention, and the promotion of gender equality and women's rights at the centre of all peace and security considerations.<sup>5</sup>

In looking at responses to the COVID-19 pandemic UN Women recognised women of the Asia-Pacific region as “fierce actors for peace and preventers of conflict.”<sup>6</sup> Pacific women have shown their ability to contribute to security and solutions by working to improve conditions in local communities and demanding a voice and human rights.<sup>7</sup> The Pacific Regional Action Plan on WPS 2012-2015 made it clear

If women and young women's contributions are recognised, sustained, strengthened and expanded, they can make a significant impact in realising the Leaders' vision of a prosperous, stable and peaceful Pacific region and ensure conflict is avoided and peace is sustained.<sup>8</sup>

Greater gender equality is strongly correlated with greater peace and stability, as well as delivering stronger economic growth and prosperity. It is beyond doubt that supporting gender equality internationally, and particularly in our region, is in Australia's national interest.

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<sup>3</sup> Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018

<sup>4</sup> Robert Aisi, Permanent Mission of Papua New Guinea to the United Nations “Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council” 17 April 2013

<sup>5</sup> Christine Agius & Anu Mundkur “The Australian Foreign Policy White Paper, gender and conflict prevention: ties that don't bind” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 74:3 2020

<sup>6</sup> UN Women *Women, Peace and Security and COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific* 2020

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/women-peace-and-security-and-covid-19-in-asia-pacific>

<sup>7</sup> Jane Alver “Regional security measures include hearing diverse women's voices” *The Strategist* ASPI 1 May 2020

<sup>8</sup> Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2015 available at

[https://www.resdal.org/wps/assets/NAPs/regional/pacific\\_region\\_regional\\_action\\_plan\\_2012-2015.pdf](https://www.resdal.org/wps/assets/NAPs/regional/pacific_region_regional_action_plan_2012-2015.pdf)

Australia, through a second National Action Plan on WPS, has the opportunity to lead in adopting a holistic approach to conflict prevention and resolution, founded on women's meaningful and substantive participation in all aspects of peace and security policy and practice. This will mean implementing comprehensive strategies aimed at addressing structures and relations that condition their choices, women's capacity and potential, and fostering linkages between access to and control over civil, political, economic and social rights.<sup>9</sup>

### **Disaster Response and Recovery**

Disaster impacts are not gender neutral, and this must be recognised in the delivery of Humanitarian and Disaster Response (HADR) by defence agencies. "Our activities during a humanitarian response can increase and reinforce, or reduce, existing inequalities."<sup>10</sup> In the Pacific, where women are already more likely to be killed by disasters than men, the resulting conditions increase the risk of sexual and gender-based violence. Some of the highest rates of sexual assault globally exist in Pacific nations,<sup>11</sup> rising in the aftermath of a disaster.

CARE Australia recommends all Disaster Response and Recovery (DRR) and HADR programs recognise and respond to the fundamental differences in how women and men prepare for and are affected by and recover from disasters, as this is essential to ensuring the basic rights of women and girls are met, and helps to make DRR and HADR more effective on a broad scale. CARE Australia's work on women's leadership in community based disaster committees found that where gender equality training had been delivered and women had taken up leadership roles, the community as a whole works together more effectively.<sup>12</sup> Research in Tafea province of Vanuatu following Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015, specifically found greater involvement of women in disaster leadership contributed to more inclusive preparedness and response.<sup>13</sup>

The Foreign Policy White Paper states "[w]e want peace to help sustain the growth that has brought the region to the centre of the global economy."<sup>14</sup> And this can only happen if women are an integral part of security discussions and processes. As noted by UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed "In Bougainville, it was women who pushed their men to lay down their arms. We must build on and invest in these capacities..."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> CARE International *From Resolution to Reality - Lessons learned from Afghanistan, Nepal and Uganda on women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance* 2010

<sup>10</sup> Kharas et al (eds) *Leave No One Behind* 2020

<sup>11</sup> Kate Morioka, UN Women *Time to Act on Gender, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Reduction* 2016  
<https://www.nab.vu/sites/default/files/documents/unw-time-to-act-r2-h.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> J Webb et al *Does Gender Responsive Disaster Risk Reduction Make a Difference? - A comparative study of Category Five tropical Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu* 2017

<sup>13</sup> J Webb *Does gender responsive Disaster Risk Reduction make a difference when a category 5 cyclone strikes?* Impact Study Summary 2016

<sup>14</sup> Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017

<sup>15</sup> Amina Mohammed UN Deputy Secretary-General "Briefing to Peace Building Commission on the joint mission to PNG" 12 May 2020 accessed at <https://reliefweb.int/report/papua-new-guinea/women-play-key-role-crafting-peaceful-sustainable-future-papua-new-guinea>