

Australia as a good international citizen: security, overseas aid, and nuclear disarmament

**Speech by
Kelvin Thomson MP
Federal Member for Wills**

**VCE FOREIGN AFFAIRS FORUM
7 August 2009**

1. *Australia as a Good International Citizen*

- Australia was one of the 50 founding members of the United Nations in 1945. Former Labor Foreign Affairs Minister Doc Evatt was its founding Chairman in San Francisco in 1945. The Australian Government is strongly committed to the United Nations and to collective international action to resolve problems that no one country can solve on its own.
- We believe in multilateral dialogue and multilateral solutions – solving problems in a peaceful and lawful way, rather than through the law of the jungle.
- The United Nations continues to be important because the key problems of the world today are global – global warming, global terrorism, global poverty, global diseases – and they require global solutions.
- Climate change, the loss of biodiversity, transnational terrorism and crime, the risk from nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts and human rights abuses – these are complex global challenges which no country can solve on its own. We need to work together to solve them.
- Australia is seeking a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council in 2013-14 so we can contribute actively to the critical role that the United Nations plays in maintaining a rules-based international order and promoting global security and freedom from want.
- The three pillars of Australia's international engagement are active participation in the institutions of global governance, including the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation, enhancing Australia's alliance relationship with the United States, and diplomatic and economic engagement in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Our foreign affairs policy objectives include:-

-Reducing the threat to Australians from terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and transnational crime, including drug trafficking, people smuggling and money laundering,

-Contributing to a comprehensive and effective international response to global warming and global poverty, and

2.

-Projecting a positive image of Australia as a tolerant, open, just and egalitarian society and promoting Australia as an international partner in education, research and innovation.

- Australia has strong economic, security, political, social and cultural ties with the United States of America. We regard the United States' system of security alliances, including the ANZUS alliance, as crucial to maintaining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific Region.
- We contribute to international peace and security by being part of the international security forces in Afghanistan and East Timor.
- We are also heavily involved in partnerships with New Zealand and Pacific Island states to promote stability, good governance and sustainable development in the South Pacific.
- We have an ongoing commitment to co-ordinate the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI).
- We have strong relations with the major states of Asia. We have close bilateral ties with Indonesia and the other ASEAN member states in South-East Asia. China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea are our major markets. Relations with India are growing strongly.
- Australia has strong historical and people to people links with Europe. We are committed to developing a broad-based, creative partnership with the European Union, addressing the contemporary challenges of climate change, international trade, security and building a strong system of international governance.
- Australia also has significant engagement in other parts of the world, including Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Australia supports the Middle East Peace Process.
- Australia is also tackling the global problems I mentioned earlier. Global warming, or climate change, caused by emissions of carbon and other greenhouse gases generated principally by the production of coal-fired electricity, by motor vehicles, and by deforestation is a major challenge to our planet's future.
- It is producing droughts, bushfires, floods, cyclones and hurricanes, sea level rise, melting glaciers and polar caps, the loss of agricultural land and the spreading of tropical diseases.
- Australia ratified the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change in 2007 and will be going to the climate change negotiations in Copenhagen in December this year to play our role in securing international agreement to halt the growth of carbon in the atmosphere. We have already committed to cutting our carbon emissions by 60% by 2050.

2. *Security*

- Another key threat to Australia is terrorism. We are engaged in regional and international co-operation to counter terrorism.
- This includes intelligence co-operation, sharing information, border control, countering terrorist financing and denying terrorists' access to nuclear, chemical and biological materials. We are active in promoting tolerance and countering terrorist propaganda.
- The arrests this week in Melbourne will put renewed focus on our counter-security-measures, and it is right that they should do so.
- The community will be encouraged by the fact that the Australian Federal Police and Victorian Police have taken action before any violence occurred, and will be encouraged by reports that police forces acted on a tip off from within the Muslim community, underscoring the fact that most Muslims do not have any violent instincts at all.
- But they will be simultaneously concerned at the allegations-and these matters are still to be determined by due judicial process, and so I stress the word allegations-of planned terrorist attacks here in Australia.
- My own view about this is that there needs to be more vetting of both prospective migrants, and temporary residents, including students, to minimise the risk that people who do not respect Australia's laws and legal system will enter this country-and someone who refuses to stand up when asked by a judge, and says 'I stand only before God', does not respect Australia's laws or legal system.
- Under John Howard migration rates to Australia skyrocketed. In 1995-96 they were 82,000, by 2006-07 they were 148,000.
- The number of temporary entry visas, including students, has also skyrocketed from 2.8 million in 1995-96 to over 4 million in 2006-07.
- This volume is putting our Immigration authorities under a lot of pressure, and making it difficult for them to do their job.
- Given time, it would be possible to get to the bottom of the background of applicants from Somalia; and elsewhere work out, whether they have any association with fundamentalist groups, and make a rational assessment of whether they pose a risk.
- Reducing our rates of immigration intake to the rates prevailing back in the 1990s would provide authorities with much more time in which to assess applications, and thereby improve Australia's security.
- It will be objected that this amounts to accusing migrants generally of being prospective terrorists, but this is no more true than the claim that the existence of a police force is an accusation that all of us are prospective criminals, or that having examiners walking down exam aisles means that all students are prospective cheats.
- The overwhelming majority of us are not prospective criminals, the overwhelming majority of students are not prospective cheats, and the overwhelming majority of migrants are not prospective terrorists.

4.

- But we are all entitled to be protected from the few who are, and slowing down the migrant intake need not be at the expense of humanitarian and refugee applicants.

3. *Overseas Aid*

- In 1970 the United Nations General Assembly adopted an international aid target of 0.7%-that richer nations like Australia should devote 0.7% of their national income in aid to poorer countries.
- In the 40 years since then five developed countries-Norway, Sweden, Luxembourg, Denmark and Netherlands- have met or exceeded the 0.7% target.
- The other developed nations have failed to reach the target, and Australia is well down the list at around 0.35%-only half of what we agreed to back in 1970.
- Australia has committed to raise this to 0.5% by 2015, but most developed nations have promised to get to the 0.7% target by then. What would it take to meet the 0.7% target?
- Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge produced a report in 2008 proposing a lift from \$3.8 billion in 2009-10 (0.35%) to \$9.2 billion (0.70%) by 2015-16.
- The rate of increase under this proposal, set in constant prices, would be around \$350 million in 2010-11 and a bit over \$1 billion in 2011-12.
- The benefits from achieving this would be great indeed. Australia could hold its head up high in the international community, and encourage other developed nations to also meet the target.
- The extra money would help us meet the Millennium Development Goals, and help us promote renewable energy and protect tropical forests.
- Most importantly, it could help tackle grinding poverty and its ugly consequences-terrorism, drugs and boat people.
- There is no prospect that Australia will be attacked or invaded by another country any time soon.
- The real threats to Australia's security come from "non-State actors"- they come from terrorist groups, they come from drug cartels, and they come from the risk of people simply coming to Australia to live here because their own countries have become intolerable.
- Given this, Australia would get value by providing more assistance to other countries by way of overseas aid.
- The compassionate thing is also the smart thing.
- First, the overseas threats that Australians are legitimately worried about-terrorism, drugs, boat people-are fuelled by grinding poverty.
- If we can help lift people in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, out of grinding poverty, we are not only doing the right thing by our fellow human beings, we are also tackling the root cause of many of our serious problems here in Australia.

5.

- Now lifting Australia's aid contribution to 0.7% will involve an increase of around \$350 million in 2010-11 and a bit over \$1 billion in 2011-12.
- The Government is committed to returning the Budget to surplus, so clearly such an increase would involve finding savings from elsewhere in the Budget-the money has to come from somewhere.
- One option which has merit in my view is scrapping the \$1.5 billion fringe benefit tax concession for company cars.
- This is a subsidy from taxpayers which has been criticised by the Australian Conservation Foundation as damaging to the environment, and by public transport groups as giving car transport an unfair advantage over public transport.
- Last year the Government's National Transport Commission proposed to the Government that the benefit be phased out over 3 years, saying it encouraged workers to drive to work and created more greenhouse gas emissions.
- The design of the tax concession rewards drivers for using their cars-the more you drive the bigger the break, and in this day and age this is perverse.
- Treasury estimates are that this car leasing benefit cost taxpayers around \$1.5 billion in 2007-2008 and is expected to cost \$2 billion this financial year.
- Scrapping it would enable us to lift our overseas aid to meet the 0.7% United Nations target, and even have some money left over, perhaps to run more public transport services and improve the alternative options for motorists.
- This is not to suggest that nothing is being done by way of overseas aid. Quite a lot is being done, and I will now outline Australia's present overseas aid program to substantiate this.
- The Australian Government's overseas aid program is a federally funded program that aims to reduce poverty in developing countries and achieve sustainable development.
- The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) manages the program.
- Australia's aid program focuses on the Asia Pacific region. The international community recognises Australia's leading role in the region, particularly in PNG and the Pacific.
- The geographic focus of Australia's aid program also makes sense given that two thirds of the world's poor, some 800 million people, reside in the Asia Pacific, yet receive less than one third of total aid flows.
- The Australian Government, through AusAID, competitively contracts aid work to Australian and international companies. These companies use their expertise to deliver aid projects and often train local people to continue the projects long after the end of the contracts.
- AusAID funds not-for-profit organisations, such as World Vision and Oxfam, to deliver aid programs at the local community level in developing countries.

6.

- In response to emergencies, AusAID staff travel to affected areas to provide immediate support. This can include communities devastated by cyclones and earthquakes, or those recovering from conflict.
- AusAID works with the governments of neighbouring countries to improve the way they deliver economic and community services. For example, Australia is working in partnership with the Solomon Islands community to improve the delivery of essential services including economic policy, prisons, law and justice, and functioning schools and hospitals.
- AusAID contributes funding to international organisations that help people in emergencies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross. We also provide funding through the United Nations to UNICEF and to the UN Development Programme, for their work in developing countries. AusAID contributes to global and regional poverty reduction programs set up by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.
- Australia was quick to respond to the global food crisis last year, making major contributions to targeted World Food Programme and World Bank trust funds. While this assistance helped deal with the immediate effects of rising food prices, addressing food insecurity is a long-term challenge requiring major investment.
- Increased development and humanitarian funding in Afghanistan will build upon the reconstruction program carried out by the Australian Defence Force in the Oruzgan Province. Australian assistance will also support the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which focuses on supporting rural development, local governance, education and access to microfinance.
- The Government is also fulfilling its election commitment for a debt to health swap with Indonesia. Australia will cancel debt owed by Indonesia in parallel with Government of Indonesia investment in programs combating tuberculosis.
- The Australian Government is also committed to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals - agreed targets set by the world's nations to reduce poverty by 2015.
- These include halving extreme poverty, getting all children into school, closing the gap on gender inequality, saving lives lost to disease and the lack of available health care, and protecting the environment.
- These are achievable commitments to improve the well-being of the world's poorest people.
- In April 2008 Prime Minister Rudd announced Australia's endorsement of the MDG Call to Action. This declaration and action agenda is a global initiative that encourages donors to engage broadly in their communities and calls them to action to reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals in collaboration with the private sector and civil society.
- The Call to Action aims to galvanise widespread support, momentum and concrete action for the Millennium Development Goals.

7.

- This will include strengthening Australia's development assistance activities to get children into primary school in East Asia and the Pacific.
- By supporting development in education Australia's aid program potentially reduces the community's vulnerability to extremism.
- The Australian Government is both intensifying efforts to support achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and planning for the post-2015 challenges.
- The Government is committed to ensuring that Australia once again becomes a development leader by ensuring that an increased aid budget has a genuinely positive impact on those who need it.
- But the problems and challenges are great.

4. *Problems in the Pacific*

- According to an AusAid report last year, titled 'Tracking development and governance in the Pacific', the Pacific region is seriously off-track in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
- The situation is worst in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste: countries that account for three-quarters of the region's population.
- At least three million people are living in extreme poverty, up to one million children are out of school, 18,000 children die each year mostly from preventable causes and between 50,000 and 150,000 people have HIV/AIDS.
- Extreme poverty- which is defined as being people who live on less than US \$1 a day- is estimated to have increased markedly in the Pacific over the last decade.
- Of the three million people living in extreme poverty the overwhelming majority are Papua New Guinean. The incidence of poverty is highest in PNG and Kiribati. Timor-Leste also has high and rising poverty, with the proportion of people on less than US \$1 a day believed to have increased from 40 per cent to 45 per cent between 2001 and 2007.
- Throughout the Pacific there are increasing numbers of underemployed and people living in settlements and makeshift dwellings.
- The strong family and community ties and access to food through basic subsistence agriculture, which have been traditional safety nets, ensuring Pacific Islanders never went hungry, are being eroded by cash economies, urbanisation and population growth.
- Rural communities are highly vulnerable to natural disasters such as cyclones and droughts that destroy food crops and livelihoods.
- Malnutrition is a growing problem. One fifth of Solomon Islanders are malnourished, as are a high proportion of the population in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste.
- High population densities, especially in urban areas, natural disasters and limited sources of cash income all increase the risk of hunger.

8.

- And now global population growth is pushing up the price of food, so rising prices of imported food are beginning to affect the poor in the Pacific, including those in urban areas.
- There is mixed progress towards universal primary education in the Pacific.
- While some Pacific islands, such as Samoa, Tonga and Fiji, are progressing well, PNG, the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste, which as I said together make up about three quarters of the region's population, are off-track to achieve universal primary education by 2015.
- As a whole the region is not on track to achieve this Millennium Development Goal Target.
- Learning achievement is low in the Pacific, with many children leaving primary school unable to read, write or solve basic mathematical problems.
- The poor quality of basic education impacts on students who move beyond school to university or into technical courses, reducing their capacity to succeed.
- And for those students who do succeed in developing technical experience and skills, the lure and higher salaries of Australia and New Zealand makes retaining skilled staff difficult. So the Pacific Islands suffer from serious and chronic skills shortages.
- Environmental threats are intensifying. Pacific Island countries will be disproportionately affected by the impact of global heating, suffering from rising sea levels, more frequent extreme weather events, bleaching of coral reefs, and setbacks in the campaigns to contain malaria and other tropical diseases.
- Commercially accessible forestry resources in the Solomon Islands are expected to be logged out within just a few years. Logging levels in Papua New Guinea are also considered to be unsustainable.
- Reductions in the amount of tuna being caught are described in the AusAid Report as "urgently required to prevent long-term damage to these fisheries".
- Taken together I believe these challenges, threats, opportunities- whatever you want to call them- make a compelling case for Australia to increase its aid budget.
- I have not spoken in any detail about Africa, Asia or elsewhere, but in many respects the islands of the Pacific are better off, with rural people having better access to food via subsistence agriculture than those in many parts of Africa and some parts of Asia.

5. Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

- I want to conclude with some remarks about Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament
- I have the honour of chairing the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Treaties.
- The Treaties Committee has been given a reference by the Prime Minister to enquire into the international treaties concerning non-proliferation and disarmament. We will be finalising our report to Parliament on these issues within the next month or two. Our Inquiry is very timely, because there is a lot happening at the moment on the nuclear proliferation and disarmament fronts, some of it good, and some of it quite disturbing.
- The first good news- apart from the fact that my Committee is carrying out an Inquiry- is that the Australian Government is heavily involved in the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, which is being Co-chaired by former Japanese Foreign Minister Ms Yoriko Kawaguchi, and former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, who has an outstanding international reputation and is doing first class work around the world building the case for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.
- That Commission is tasked with reinvigorating the global effort against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and seeking to shape a global consensus to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in the lead up to the Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty which will be held in April next year. These Review Conferences are only held every five years, and the last one in 2005 was an absolute flop, so it is essential that next year's Conference makes progress down the nuclear non-proliferation path.
- And the really good news is that the speech by United States President Barack Obama in Prague in April this year has injected new life, new vitality, new momentum, into the whole non-proliferation and disarmament debate.
- This debate has been languishing, going around in circles, going nowhere, for years, maybe decades.
- The previous US President had no interest in it, and the United States had been undermining and white-anting attempts to make progress.
- But significantly, in an article in the Wall Street Journal in January 2008, United States former Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former Defence Secretary William Perry, and former chairman of the US Senate Armed Services Committee Sam Nunn wrote about the threat from the spread of nuclear weapons.
- Now these men have had many years experience at the apex of United States defence and foreign policy and they could under no circumstances be thought of as left-wing peaceniks.

- But they said in their article “The accelerating spread of nuclear weapons, nuclear know-how and nuclear material has brought us to a nuclear tipping point...The steps we are taking now to address these threats are not adequate to the danger”.
- They went on to suggest steps the international community could take to lessen the danger:-

-First, requiring all Non-Proliferation Treaty signatories to adopt monitoring provisions designed by the International Atomic Energy Agency, in order to strengthen the means of monitoring compliance with the Treaty

-Secondly, develop an international system to manage the nuclear fuel cycle, and

-Third, bring the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty into force.

- And Barack Obama’s Prague Speech built on the momentum of that Wall Street Journal article, providing a blueprint for United States leadership on a broad-ranging and ambitious non-proliferation and disarmament agenda.
- He described the future of nuclear weapons in the 21st century as fundamental to the security of America and to the peace of the world. He said “Today I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons”- I repeat, a world without nuclear weapons.
- He went on to say “to put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and we urge others to do the same...To reduce our warhead stockpiles, we will negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with the Russians this year...[And I will add that progress was made on this front in July in Moscow in talks between Presidents Obama and Medvedev].
- Barack Obama said “To achieve a global ban on nuclear testing, my administration will immediately and aggressively pursue US ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty...And to cut off the building blocks needed for a bomb, the United States will seek a new treaty that verifiably ends the production of fissile materials intended for use in state nuclear weapons...And we should build a framework for civil nuclear co-operation, including an international fuel bank, so that countries can access peaceful power without increasing the risks of proliferation”.
- Now all of these announcements were, in my view, very good news, and they’ve breathed new life into places like the United Nations, Conference on Disarmament, which had become largely moribund.
- But I said earlier that there’s also been plenty of bad news on the nuclear front. North Korea has tested rockets that could be used for long range missiles and conducted a nuclear explosion, in flagrant breach of United Nations rules.

- Iran has also been engaged in nuclear and ballistic missile activity. It has locked out the inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose job it is to make sure countries producing nuclear power to generate electricity are not also trying to produce nuclear weapons.
- And terrorists are seeking to acquire nuclear weapons. Al Qaeda has said it seeks a bomb and would be prepared to use it.
- This is particularly troubling in relation to Pakistan, which has nuclear weapons and also has active terrorist insurgents. And finally, while the United States is now highly positive about the non-proliferation and disarmament cause, it remains to be seen whether other countries will now also come on board.
- There has always been a problem in getting agreement on a forward program of action in the disarmament and non-proliferation area, because the countries which have nuclear weapons keep stressing the priority of non-proliferation- that is, making sure no other country gets nuclear weapons- whereas countries which don't have nuclear weapons keep stressing the priority of disarmament- that is, obliging the nuclear armed countries to get rid of their bombs.
- Too often this difference of approach has led to international stalemate. Clearly we need to have action on both fronts.
- My Committee will be reporting on how we see the way forward on key issues such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, strengthening the International Atomic Energy Agency, developing an international fuel bank, and making real progress at the 2010 Review Conference for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- I thank you for the opportunity to talk about these important issues this afternoon.