

**AID CUTS CONFIRM AUSTRALIA'S MOST INSULAR FOREIGN POLICY IN 60 YEARS**

Last night's federal budget rejected the recent, strong recommendation from fellow OECD governments for Australia to reverse the dramatic reduction in our contribution to international aid and development over the last four years. As the 13<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, Australia has slid to the bottom end of OECD countries in this area.

Caritas Australia's CEO, Paul O'Callaghan, said: "The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper stated that Australia was a *"regional power with global interests ... We will have to work harder to maximise our international influence"*. Now we are going in the opposite direction".

"After the major aid funding cuts since 2014, the decision to further reduce the aid program by \$141m over four years has placed our wealthy country in its most insular period of international engagement in 60 years."

"Just as the New Zealand government increases its aid commitment by 30% and the UK conservative government continues aid spending at more than three times the proportionate level of its income to aid, Australia is stepping away from its goal of being a regional power." he said.

The Australian aid program is part of a collective international effort to end extreme poverty, promote prosperity and ensure that the rights of people are respected. This has achieved huge improvements in public health, access to clean drinking water and the number of children going to school.

"Australia's current National Security Strategy presents international aid, as well as defence and diplomacy, as vital for Australia to adapt to the significant international challenges over the next decade", he said.

In terms of the priorities for this region, the federal budget's minimalist response to the acute needs of Indo-Pacific neighbours on climate change adds to the growing perception of Australia shrinking into its most insular period since the end of the Second World War.

Since the 1960s, successive governments have provided strong leadership on behalf of the Australian community on global aid efforts. Caritas Australia urges a renewed bipartisan commitment to aid that would re-instate Australia as a global leader in helping end poverty, tackle climate change and promote justice for all.

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