



AUSTRALIA



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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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General Debate of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

**Statement by Senator The Hon Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia**

(Check against delivery)

Mr President

We are all proud members of this venerable institution.

If this place, and our membership of it, stand for anything, then we stand for an international order based on rules and cooperation.

This principle guides our actions, our dealings with each other, and our treatment of collective challenges as they arise before us.

Australia recognises the reality of a world in which the power of great states shapes the international system in which we seek to advance our national interests. That is the grain with which we all work.

Equally, we hold true to this simple proposition – we will be safer and more prosperous in a world where global differences are managed, and global challenges met, by agreed rules rather than by the exercise of power alone.

Strong global cooperation sets a tone, and sets in place rules and norms, for constructive diplomacy in every region of the world.

This is true even in a period of rapid and accelerating change, and it is true even in a period of rising nationalism and geo-political competition.

None of our most urgent global challenges can be solved by countries acting alone. Solutions begin with collaboration.

In Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, we set out an analysis of the trends that are shaping the world. Most importantly, we set out our policy response.

In a more competitive and contested era, Australia is taking responsibility for our own security and prosperity. At home, we are investing in our national resilience and strength, ensuring our economy is strong and Australians are safe. We are sovereign and independent.

In our region - the Indo-Pacific - we seek a neighbourhood in which the rights of all states are respected and adherence to rules delivers lasting peace.

Internationally, we are committed to promoting and protecting the rules and institutions that support stability and prosperity, and enable collective action to meet global challenges.

Challenges

Mr President, at this time of change, challenge and opportunity, we Member State representatives have the honour of preserving and advancing international rules and order, to deliver on the expectations of our people for a just, fair, and secure world.

One proof of the necessity of the United Nations is the hard fact that we cannot with all confidence rid the world of nuclear weapons today or this year.

Given this reality, we must redouble our efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation, and to build the international trust and confidence necessary to move towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

Our peoples expect us to continue to work towards verifiable nuclear disarmament with sound compliance, safeguards and enforcement regimes.

Overwhelmingly, our peoples expect us to prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons. To do this, we must continue to build on the progress we have made through the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

For this reason, Australia supports the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear program, as long as Iran abides by its commitments. It is in our collective interests that controls on Iran's nuclear programme remain in place.

And for this reason, the world observes the negotiations between the United States and North Korea, pursuing complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the Peninsula, in accordance with UN Resolutions. Australia will also continue to fully implement our obligations under the United Nations Security Council and maintain our own autonomous sanctions while awaiting progress towards denuclearisation. Further, we have most recently witnessed a new pattern of indiscriminate slaughter through the use of chemical weapons, including the weaponisation of toxic industrial chemicals such as chlorine. We have collectively agreed that the use of chemical weapons anytime, anywhere, and under any circumstances is unjustifiable and unacceptable.

As Member States, we must defend our long-standing prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, and abide by our collective right and resolve to investigate allegations, and to verify this prohibition. Australia joins those calling for Syria to cease the use of chemicals as weapons. Australia also continues to urge Russia, and all nations, to reinforce the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons anywhere.

Mr President, Australia like the United Nations is committed to improving humanitarian assistance in fragile settings. I commend the Secretary General for establishing the “United for Gender Parity” initiative, and for declaring zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse.

Australia is also a robust and strong contributor to the UN’s Women Peace and Security agenda, first set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Australia was one of the first Member States to draw up a National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security, and we are continuing work on our next five year National Action Plan.

Examples of our work on this issue include a benchmark of a minimum of 15 per cent of female military members deployed on Australian peacekeeping mission teams, which I was proud to support and to work to see grow over the past three years in my previous role as Australia’s Minister for Defence. Australia also has active training programs on Women Peace and Security in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines, where our military is assisting partner forces to deal with counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency challenges.

Australia firmly believes that it is only through the inclusion of women in all aspects of peace and security initiatives, including negotiations, the design of peace processes, and the management and enforcement of peace programs, that lasting and resilient security can be achieved.

Mr President, many here will remember my predecessor and friend Julie Bishop's determined and sustained work pursuing accountability for the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17. Australia remains resolutely committed to this objective, and we will continue working with our Joint Investigation Team partners to pursue justice for the victims and their loved ones.

In expecting other Member States to abide by international rules, we must also subject ourselves to those same standards and expectations.

Australia and Timor-Leste signed a new Maritime Boundaries Treaty here in New York on 6 March this year.

The Treaty was the successful result of the first-ever compulsory conciliation initiated under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Treaty underscores Australia's commitment to international law, and is testament to the way in which international law, in particular the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, enables countries to resolve disputes peacefully and properly, abiding by the rules.

The conciliation process created the space for compromise and negotiation on what I acknowledge was a previously intractable disagreement, and ultimately strengthened bilateral relations.

Mr President, when Member States work together to uphold international law and the institutions that support it, the benefits accrue to all alike: the powerful and the weak, the large and the small.

This is a long-standing principle we share, regardless of our culture, language, religion or political system: we are all equal before the law.

Our region

Mr President, Australia particularly welcomes the active engagement of the UN in our region, the Indo-Pacific. It is a youthful and dynamic region which has experienced an economic transformation in recent decades that is unprecedented in human history.

The region's rising prosperity has been built on a foundation of stability.

Australia is absolutely committed to ensuring that the fundamental principles which have enabled the region's success are maintained.

We are committed to a region in which the rights of all states are respected. A region characterised by respect for international law and other norms, and where disputes are resolved peacefully. And a region in which open markets facilitate the free flow of trade, capital and ideas.

To achieve these outcomes Australia is strengthening our Indo-Pacific bilateral relations, because they are among our most important in their

own right and because strong bilateral relations help support our regional goals.

Our aid program is an important mechanism through which we support the aspirations of our neighbours. It is predominately and unashamedly focused on the Indo-Pacific region and geared to expand opportunities for people, business and communities to promote economic growth and further reduce regional poverty.

We work in sectors that drive economic growth and human development, including aid for trade, infrastructure, education and health, and empowering women and girls. And we work in ways that are most effective, including with UN Resident Coordinators, and through the region's political, security and economic architecture.

ASEAN

Mr President, ASEAN sits at the heart of the region. It is the collective voice of Southeast Asia. A vital piece of that regional architecture.

There are good reasons why Australia is ASEAN's longest standing dialogue partner. We are both committed to driving continued strong regional economic growth and we share optimism for the future. At the same-time we share a conviction to tackle head on the security challenges of our region, including the fight against terrorism.

As the convener for more than 50 years of the Indo-Pacific's most important diplomatic architecture, particularly the East Asia Summit, ASEAN plays a vital role in the security, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific.

Australia's interests are well served by ASEAN and our commitment to its continued effectiveness and success is stronger than ever.

This commitment was there for all to see at an ASEAN-Australia Special Summit, held in Sydney in March this year. The Summit marked a new era in the Strategic Partnership between ASEAN and Australia. Leaders issued the Sydney Declaration, which comprehensively sets out ASEAN and Australia's shared commitment to work together towards a more secure and prosperous region.

APEC

In other key pieces of regional architecture, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, or APEC, seeks to build upon the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific's 21 member economies. The APEC meeting in Papua New Guinea in November will be an important further opportunity to foster cooperation and economic activity across borders, to the mutual benefit of all.

I commend Papua New Guinea on the work it has done to host APEC 2018, and look forward in particular to a successful Leaders' Week later this year.

I also commend the Republic of Nauru for its successful hosting of the 49th Pacific Islands Forum in the first week of September. With the theme of “Building a strong Pacific: our islands, our people, our will”, the member states, associate members, observers and dialogue partners of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat continued the long tradition of amity, consultation, partnership and policy development on diverse matters of climate change, economic reform, transport and trade.

Australia is committed to working with member states, and UN Resident Coordinators, to strengthen resilience to climate change and natural disasters in the Pacific. In all of this, the UN Development Program is a vital partner.

Australia recognises that Pacific island countries are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and disaster, and that this is a leading priority for the region. The Pacific Islands Forum Boe Declaration, released last month at the meeting by member states, takes a contemporary view of security inclusive of human and environmental security and emphasises the importance of regional cooperation and collaboration in building resilience to disasters and climate change.

Mr President, Australia seeks a region that promotes accountability and respects international law for the benefit of all nations.

In 2018 we joined the Human Rights Council for the first time.

Australia has been a strong supporter of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, and we have been deeply disturbed by its findings.

We are working with Myanmar and with ASEAN and regional partners to find long-term solutions to this crisis, including with Indonesia as co-chairs of the Bali Process and through joint humanitarian efforts in Cox's Bazar.

Australia will continue to work with the Myanmar Government and the international community towards a long-term and durable resolution of the nation's complex problems.

After 50 years of isolation and instability, Myanmar is at critical stage in its democratic and economic transition, and it is in all our interests to ensure it succeeds.

Let us honour the late Secretary-General Kofi Annan by renewing our efforts to see fully and genuinely implemented the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which he led.

Conclusion

Mr President, international institutions, and the United Nations in particular, help us to adapt collectively as our world changes around us. But as the Secretary General noted when he opened the General Assembly "trust in global governance is also fragile, as 21st-century challenges outpace 20th-century institutions and mindsets".

This is why Australia supports the Secretary General's work to reform the UN.

We need to work together to keep pace with the needs and aspirations of the people we serve.

But to remain fit for our times, the United Nations must remain true to the founding principles, the universal rights and obligations, we agreed upon when we first came together as Member States.

Chief among these is the sovereign equality of all states.

Member States must re-dedicate themselves to the aspirations of the founders of the United Nations, and take to heart the Charter, so that our world is a more just, fair and secure place to live.

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