



2020 FEDERAL BUDGET STATEMENT

As the world prepares to commemorate 20 years of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda globally, alongside other global anniversaries^[1], the Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security is concerned that Australia has taken a backwards step in announcing its largest ever defence budget.

The \$3.5 billion increase to the defence budget follows the release of the Government's *2020 Defence Strategic Update* in July^[2], which committed \$575 billion in defence funding over the next decade in its response to a "post-COVID world that is poorer, more dangerous and more disorderly."^[3] This single year increase to Defence spending is almost equal in size to the entire annual aid budget.

This increased militarisation is a deeply disappointing and misguided response to growing insecurity. Use of force in conflict resolution has been found to create and perpetuate cycles of violence.^[4] Increasing militarisation risks worsening the situation for women globally who are already grappling with the intersecting threats of COVID-19, economic recession, climate change and deteriorating gender inequality.

In contrast to record spending on Defence, the Budget papers do not signal any investment in Women, Peace and Security at a time when the threat of conflict and insecurity to the achievement of gender equality and sustainable development is growing. The Government is also stalling on the release of the 2nd National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which was scheduled for release in 2019. This delay is of concern given that COVID-19 has been recognised as critical priority for the WPS agenda.

Investment in development assistance is much more effective in ensuring peace, stability and gender equality than increasing investment in defence capability, yet the Government has once again refused to make an ongoing commitment to increasing development assistance. This failure to adequately value development assistance jeopardises the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 which aims to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

The one off \$304.7m Covid-19 package for the Pacific and Timor Leste is welcome, but it is woefully inadequate to address the scale of the challenge facing low-income countries as they respond to the world's largest humanitarian crisis. The package also stands in contrast with cuts to some of the world's poorest countries that are most in need of development assistance. The Coalition is particularly concerned about cuts in the aid budget to Afghanistan (35% reduction), the Middle East and North Africa (61% reduction) and Sub-Saharan Africa (48% reduction), which are all facing severe insecurity and conflict, and where women's rights are under threat.^[5]

As the Women, Peace and Security agenda also has domestic application, the Coalition is also concerned that the budget has not meaningfully addressed women's increasing economic insecurity or announced any new funding for services responding to violence against women. This is despite disproportionate job losses and economic impacts being felt by women in this country, alongside increased reports of domestic violence.

The Government has also failed to scale up investment to address climate change – in fact, reducing aid spending on climate partnerships by \$5 million - despite the Boe Declaration affirming that

“climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific.”^[6] The Coalition implores the Government to respond to rising insecurity by increasing its development assistance, including by providing targeted funding to women’s rights organisations that are best placed to respond to the disproportionate impacts the crisis is having on women and girls.

In this light, the Coalition looks toward the release of an adequately funded Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and calls on Australia to take the opportunity of the anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 to demonstrate leadership in resourcing a robust Women Peace and Security agenda.

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Notes to editors:

^[1] 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), 5th anniversary of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and 75th anniversary of the United Nations (UN).

^[2] Department of Defence (2020) *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, https://www.defence.gov.au/StrategicUpdate-2020/docs/2020_Defence_Strategic_Update.pdf

^[3] Macmillan, J and Greene, A (2020) *Australia to spend \$270b building larger military to prepare for 'poorer, more dangerous' world and rise of China*, ABC News, 30 June, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-30/australia-unveils-10-year-defence-strategy/12408232>

^[4] UN Women, 2015, *Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325*, https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf

^[5] UNDP (2019) *Human Development Report 2019*, pp, 312-319, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>

^[6] Pacific Islands Forum (2018) “Boe Declaration on Regional Security,” <https://www.forumsec.org/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security is a non-partisan and independent coalition of civil society organisations, networks and individuals working to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in Australia, Asia and the Pacific region and globally. It brings together activists, feminists, practitioners, humanitarian actors and those with first-hand experience working in the frontline on issues relating to women, peace and security. Coalition members have wide ranging expertise in gender and peace. <http://wpscoalition.org>