



Inquiry into Supporting Democracy in our Region

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE &
TRADE

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SUMMARY

- Address rising poverty, which can fuel anti-democratic politics of dashed hopes. Invest in social infrastructure around the region. Expand health, education, and social protection systems to improve community resilience against the “polycrisis” now sowing doubts in liberal democratic ideals and the rules-based order.
- Invest in liberal civil society strengthening efforts across Asia and the Pacific, primarily by investing in Australian civil society organisations and their regional outreach, networks, and partnerships. Invest in rapid-response research and advocacy by CSOs in response to regional shocks, incentivise research and advocacy in development programming, and expand the Australian Regional Leadership Initiative.
- Ensure a principled and consistent approach towards promoting democracy and supporting the international rules-based order, including by supporting multilateral institutions that promote democracy and human rights.

ABOUT SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children is a civil society organisation (CSO) with a wide Indo-Pacific footprint and a 100-year history of working to protect children and advance children's rights all around the world. Since the onset of COVID-19, we have argued that Australia should enhance its focus on assisting our neighbours to assemble the "social" infrastructure they will require to rebuild their societies and economies in the wake of the pandemic's intersecting health and economic impacts.¹ We argue for the primacy of human security considerations, especially the safety and wellbeing of children, in Australia's approach to foreign policy, and for Australia's international development program to have more prominence in discussions of Australian statecraft and geostrategy.

Save the Children Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we work. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

We would be delighted to talk more about our submission with you. Please contact:

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A. AUSTRALIA FACES A LESS DEMOCRATIC REGION

In addition to a protracted crisis of economic growth and inclusion, one widely recognised symptom of the contemporary "polycrisis" or confluence of "megathreats" is a worldwide democratic recession, pointing to the fragility of democratic polities in rich and poor nations alike.²

That democracy is in retreat is confirmed by leading democracy barometers such as the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, whose latest report argues that "the last 30 years of democratic advances," that is, since 1989, "are now eradicated." As a result, 70 per cent of the world's population – or 5.4 billion people – now live in closed autocracies, including electoral autocracies.

Narrowing the scope to Australia's region, according to V-Dem, Asia and the Pacific form a region in which this democratic decline is "especially evident," including in major G20 countries such as India, Bangladesh, Thailand, and The Philippines. Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Hong Kong are also seriously affected.³

This democratic backsliding is increasingly preventing communities in our region from organising to articulate and find common solutions to collective problems. According to V-Dem, globally, 35 countries suffered "significant deteriorations in freedom of expression at the hands of governments." Further, and spurred by polarisation, misinformation, and the rise of highly

¹ Our most recent version of this argument is available in Save the Children, 'Australia's New International Development Policy', 30 November 2022, <https://savethechildren.org.au/our-work/policy-and-publications/government-policy-papers>.

² Adam Tooze, *Shutdown: How Covid Shook the World's Economy* (Penguin Books, 2021); Nouriel Roubini, *Megathreats: The Ten Trends That Imperil Our Future, and How to Survive Them* (Hachette UK, 2022). For a more focused discussion on democracy in Asia specifically, see Aurel Croissant and Jeffrey Haynes, 'Democratic Regression in Asia: Introduction', *Democratization* 28, no. 1 (2021): 1–21.

³ V-Dem Institute, 'Democracy Report 2022: Autocratisation Changing Nature' (Sweden: University of Gothenburg, 2022), https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf.

mobilised, anti-pluralist politics, 33 countries are “autocratising,” a condition that is characterised by repression of the media and civil society, which occurred in 22 and 21 of the nations concerned.⁴

That civic space is narrowing is confirmed by the global CIVICUS Alliance. The latest CIVICUS Monitor report points out that as many as 117 of 197 assessed countries experience “serious civic space restrictions,” including every nation in Southeast Asia, a region critical to Australia.⁵

B. DEMOCRATIC DECLINE HARMS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Democratic backsliding is one factor destabilising the rights and prospects of children and young people across the “Indo-Pacific.” Further, it is harming them in conjunction with their regression against multidimensional poverty indicators due to the impacts of the Ukraine conflict and the pandemic. It cannot, therefore, be treated as an isolated issue confined to the domain of politics; rather, it is interacting in dangerous ways with the economic shocks the region has experienced in recent years.

Many youths are growing up amid shocks and development setbacks they thought would be left behind with their grandparents as Asia. In particular, this has “risen” over the last four decades, only for its populations to find this “rise” is no longer delivering improved prosperity or security. The World Bank’s most recent reporting demonstrates this dynamic, pointing out that “the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed triggered the most pronounced setback in the fight against global poverty since 1990, and most likely since World War II.”⁶ Put another way, “the magnitude of the COVID-19–induced increase is more than four times larger than the [1990s] Asian Financial Crisis–induced increase after controlling for differences in global population.” That translates to 90 million additional poor people — “the net impact of the pandemic.”⁷

This setback has produced heterogenous impacts, and Australia’s region is experiencing a complex patchwork of these effects. For example, although some upper middle-income countries were able to finance cash transfers to citizens through the pandemic’s lockdowns, others, and most of the world’s lower-middle-income countries, including many in Australia’s region, have seen increases in poverty.⁸ Further, not all losses have been monetary. As the Bank elaborates, “some countries have suffered high mortality and education losses, but they have been able to limit the impacts of monetary poverty by enacting social protection policies.” Other countries have seen limited increases in mortality but have recorded significant monetary poverty or education losses.”⁹

These losses are now imposing a variety of costs “on the life chances of the following generation.”¹⁰ For example, youth and low-skilled workers have experienced employment declines, with a gender gap in working hours growing wider in the first quarter of 2022 than before the pandemic in low and middle-income countries (despite recovering in high income countries). In terms of broad trends across the developing world, including Australia’s region, women, the less educated, informal workers, and the self-employed have been hit hardest, with exceptions where the option exists to

⁴ V-Dem Institute.

⁵ CIVICUS, ‘Civicus Monitor 2022’, accessed 16 January 2023, <https://findings2021.monitor.civicus.org/in-numbers.html>.

⁶ The World Bank, ‘Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course’, 46, accessed 6 October 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-and-shared-prosperity>.

⁷ The World Bank, 50.

⁸ The World Bank, 4.

⁹ The World Bank, 99.

¹⁰ The World Bank, 195.

rely on the land for agricultural production. In Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, young, female, and less skilled workers suffered the most job losses. In India, women's employment has not recovered.¹¹

These conditions are placing a great deal of pressure on households and the evidence is mounting that many are turning to negative coping mechanisms as their aspirations are dashed, such as cutting spending on feeding and schooling children.¹² Despite a number of important recent investments in cash transfer payments in some Upper-Middle Income Southeast Asian nations, most of our neighbours across Southeast Asia and the Pacific have social protection systems that have limited or patchy coverage. For many children and young people in our region, then, there is simply insufficient protection from recent and future economic shocks. Social solidarity economies, and customary and new mutual self-help traditions, do assist and are both evolving and being revived, but households and communities cannot carry national economies without a combination of assistance and new strategies for inclusive economic growth.¹³

In this context, political-economic conditions in the region are increasingly unstable, and grievances are not easy for the region's states to contain in a manner that is open and responsive. In these conditions – and given civic space for liberal organising and advocacy is so limited – highly mobilised illiberal coalitions are often the channels through which communities are organising access to mutual self-help traditions and pressuring states to pay attention to their psycho-social security. These coalitions are often anti-pluralist and opposed to purportedly “liberal” or “Western” ideas of human rights – especially when they propagate pluralist norms – and can use “culturalist” arguments to negate them, sometimes co-opting the language of “decolonisation” to do so.¹⁴ These conditions are only further constricting liberal civil society organising, leaving communities less able to collectively formulate democratic solutions to their problems and advocate for themselves.

C. WHAT CAN AUSTRALIA DO?

In these conditions, for Australia to have an impact in helping to protect democratic norms around the region, it needs a dual approach that both invests in human development and human security on the one hand; and opens regional civic space and strengthens civil societies on the other. In this context, it needs to pay special attention to children's needs and rights, while adopting a practical approach in discussions about values.

¹¹ The World Bank, 79.

¹² For example, refer to the case of Malaysia, where the soaring price of eggs is reducing access to this cheap and healthy protein source. See ‘Hangrier and Hangrier: How Malaysia's Food Crisis Is Worsening’, 30 August 2022, <https://betweenthelines.my/hangrier-and-hangrier-malysias-food-crisis-goes-from-bad-to-worse/>. Refer also to Papua New Guinea, where households are pulling children out of school, spending down savings, and selling assets to cope. See ‘COVID-19 in Papua New Guinea - Economic and Social Impacts : Insights from the Fourth Round of High Frequency Phone Surveys - Data Collected in December 2021’, accessed 23 January 2023, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/37736>.

¹³ For more discussion of social solidarity economies and community self-help traditions, and the role of strong social protection systems in supporting economic recoveries around the region, refer to OECD Development Centre, ‘Can Social Protection Be an Engine for Inclusive Growth?’, Development Centre Studies (OECD, 2019); Steven Ratuva et al., eds., *COVID-19 and Social Protection: A Study in Human Resilience and Social Solidarity* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-2948-8>.

¹⁴ See Priya Chacko and Kanishka Jayasuriya, ‘Asia's Conservative Moment: Understanding the Rise of the Right’, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48, no. 4 (2018): 533.

Australia should treat democracy promotion as a human security necessity and not use democratic values as an ideological wedge that splits the region into competing blocs.¹⁵ Nor should it narrowly focus its attention on state institutions, as such institutions can quickly be captured or turned to illiberal purposes if political economic conditions worsen, which they easily could.¹⁶ Further, any democracy promotion initiatives that Australia elects to establish should not be captured by one single part of our knowledge sector, especially if its main focus is on these institutions.

Rather, collaborative outreach to the region with and by Australian CSOs should be prioritised. With diverse and highly skilled staff profiles and wide, usually permanent, Indo-Pacific footprints and networks, Australian CSOs hold an important stock of Australia's regional knowledge as well as key policy and advocacy skills. They are also operational powerhouses, running social businesses and delivering development programs all around the region. It is time to invest more seriously in Australian CSOs, as our recommendations below outline.¹⁷

In terms of the approach Australia should adopt to democratic institutions, it should devote renewed attention to supporting not only national but also multilateral institutions, especially those that promote democratic norms and human rights. Australia should also ensure that its approach to rights is principled and consistent, including by taking regional criticism of its own human rights record seriously.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

As the key drivers for the region's democratic decline are both political and economic, for Australia to have an impact it must address – and be seen to address – both sets of problems in a principled and constructive manner.

1. Address poverty, health, and education and prioritise children and young people

In light of the conditions set out above, Save the Children has argued in a recent submission to DFAT for Australia to use the whole of its development program – including not only its Official Development Assistance (ODA) investment but also its Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) – to address rising poverty and invest in “social infrastructure.”¹⁸ Under this label, we include social protection systems and climate resilient community health and education infrastructure, including both physical and digital systems to support e-health and e-learning. Such investments can help limit learning loss by offering households options for protecting their health and accessing education, while cash transfer payments can help them pay for school equipment and nutritious meals.

As the World Bank points out, “policies that improve child outcomes are often of high value, across contexts,” and “spending on health and education can be pro-poor.” Indeed, “investment in child education and health will likely have high value,” according to the Bank, “especially if it can reach

¹⁵ For an example of this treatment, listen to Rory Medcalf and Peter Khalil, ‘National Security Podcast: Peter Khalil MP on the Competition between Authoritarianism and Democracy’, *Asia and the Pacific Policy Society Policy Forum* (blog), 13 October 2022, <https://www.policyforum.net/national-security-podcast-peter-khalil-mp-on-the-competition-between-authoritarianism-and-democracy/>.

¹⁶ For more elaboration along these lines, please refer to Richard Robison and Garry Rodan's submission to this Inquiry. See also Chacko and Jayasuriya, ‘Asia's Conservative Moment’, 533.

¹⁷ Refer also to ACFID's and Susannah Patton's submissions to this Inquiry.

¹⁸ See Save the Children, ‘Australia's New International Development Policy’.

poorer households.”¹⁹ The World Bank also shows that social protection cash transfers are cost-effective and have multiplier effects in local economies, and that developing country governments – South Africa in the Bank’s case study – can be supported to draw on this evidence to design good social protection systems.²⁰ The resulting effect is of “positioning fiscal policy to protect households against future crises.”²¹

At present, there is no requirement that Australian-funded infrastructure should produce social benefits, or that it should include social development top-up projects, and this can cause the infrastructure component of Australia’s development program to sometimes work at cross-purposes to the ODA-funded component. As a result, even in the midst of the polycrisis, children and young people occupy a social, economic, and political terrain that is overshadowed by other development priorities – such as major power infrastructure competition. As communities across Asia and the Pacific are entirely aware of how rich, Western states frame and speak about them, they are also aware that they are not our main priority. This awareness is raising questions about whether the regional order truly benefits them, and the answers are being provided by anti-pluralist politics.

Over the next four years, Australia will have stewardship of an ODA budget of more than \$4.5 billion per annum; a drawing facility administered through the AIFFP that has doubled in size; several sovereign loans; a part in several global debt refinancing measures; and a growing range of NGO-managed investment instruments, as well as a pool of public and philanthropic donations. All these modalities should aim to build the social infrastructure the region’s communities need to support their capacity to deal with the polycrisis, including by financing it directly; by de-risking facilities that expand and diversify access to finance; or by enabling debt relief to free up fiscal space to enable co-investment. They should also support policy research and advocacy, including by local civil society organisations and their international networks, and support the climate-resilient, small-scale community infrastructure these communities need – not fall into the trap of focusing solely on big-ticket hard infrastructure projects.²²

Our recommendations from that submission are also included here:

- a) *Ensure that the overarching aim of Australia’s investments in international development is to alleviate poverty, insecurity, and inequality around the Indo-Pacific and beyond, and ensure that all of the Australian Government’s development financing instruments are arranged in terms of building the systems and social infrastructure that will help achieve this aim.*
- b) *Recognise the disproportionate threat to children’s rights and wellbeing and ensure alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child via a child rights policy and commitment to protect and promote child rights, including accountability and reporting processes, in our region.*
- c) *Ensure that ODA funds development outcomes, including when used within the AIFFP, to allow for social infrastructure investments to be packaged together with hard infrastructure projects. Prioritise small-scale community infrastructure within the climate infrastructure stream that will be created within the AIFFP and ensure that human development dividends are required from all projects.*

¹⁹ The World Bank, ‘Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course’, 195.

²⁰ The World Bank, 230.

²¹ The World Bank, 215.

²² For more detail, please refer Save the Children, ‘Australia’s New International Development Policy’.

- d) *Capitalise on existing infrastructure partnerships with regional partners, and each partner's relative expertise, by using them to increase joint social infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific.*
- e) *Aim Australia's interactions with multilateral forums such as the G20, including on debt relief and International Monetary Fund Special Drawing Rights redistribution, at freeing up resources to build, finance, and advocate for improved social infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific.*
- f) *Invest in building social protection programs and ending violence against children as flagship measures of Australia's development cooperation.*

2. Invest in civil society strengthening work, both in the region and by investing in Australian CSOs and their regional outreach

- a) *Australia should establish an independent institution and standing fund to invest in programs and projects aimed at quickly understanding emerging human security challenges and promoting democratic norms and cultures across the region.*

As we outlined in our submission to the Funding Public Research in Foreign Policy Inquiry, working in this fast-changing regional context is generating new questions that require rapid response research and advocacy activity.²³ For example, as the pandemic shut down regional economies in early 2020, months passed before evidence became available of what choices households were making in response to their job and income losses. For example, were they able to continue their children's educations or did they pull them out of school to make their budgets stretch further? In addition, what explanatory narratives were people listening to as they made these hard choices? What forms of politics were they turning to?

In this context, we could have used a standing pool of funding for rapid research projects that helped us answer these questions. We could not have been assisted by research funding that is targeted only at universities, and we have not found the Australian Research Council Linkage program fast or affordable enough to access. Nor are Australian thinktanks, which can operate faster than universities, sufficiently focused on human security issues to prioritise such questions. Because of our lack of access to an appropriate pool of dedicated funding, we were hampered from participating in research and debate in relation to how states should act to limit the impact of the pandemic on political and economic conditions in the region.

Australia should explicitly value relationships between Australian CSOs and our counterparts in the region. CSOs have a special role to play in cultivating norms and cultures of democracy and human rights as key priorities of a liberal, rules-based, international order. Australian CSOs are effective development and humanitarian actors and important soft power assets. Appreciation for our work by Indo-Pacific communities accrues to Australia and its nation-branding efforts in the region. We play a special and critical role in maintaining healthy democracies, including through partnerships and advocacy in Australia and around the Indo-Pacific. Our independent voices and networks are strong forces for regional norm-creation and promotion, and our non-government, non-market positioning gives us a capacity for critique and advocacy that further demonstrates Australia's commitment to liberal values and democracy in the region. Further, our rights-oriented positioning

²³ Please also refer to our submission that that inquiry, Save the Children, 'Funding for Public Research into Foreign Policy Issues', 1 April 2021, <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/817e318b-9d35-488f-8e1a-cf2e3971131/funding-for-public-research-into-foreign-policy-issues.pdf.aspx>.

and networks with other rights-oriented CSOs across the Indo-Pacific differentiates us from populist, identity-oriented, or illiberal movements around the region, including in Southeast Asia, and indeed provides an important counterweight to them.

- b) When assessing funding proposals for international development programming funded by Australian ODA, Australia should apply a 5 per cent weighting for research, policy development, and policy advocacy that is integrated into operational activity.*

Many of the funding pools to which CSOs have access strongly incentivise narrow, top-down approaches to project delivery. Compounded by the scarcity of funding, the granting environment in Australia leads CSOs to prioritise the needs of their program teams over their contribution to public debate. The resulting tight distribution of resources limits CSOs' capacity to direct a large enough proportion of our operational funding towards research and advocacy, including where this advocacy might promote liberal explanations and democratic values. As a result, organisations like CIVICUS and United Nations (UN) special mandate holders, such as the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders,²⁴ have found in recent years that CSOs in Australia operate in a "narrowed" civic space. Removing such limits on our ability to build and amplify liberal narratives will assist us and our regional partners to offer liberal alternatives to illiberal narratives and channels for community organisation.

Our operational and policy teams are engaged with regional human security issues and experience the contraction of civic and democratic space in many of the countries we work in, every day. And yet, the work that CSOs do is intrinsic to the very culture of democracy and supporting CSOs greatly enhances Australia's reputation for norm promotion in its advocacy for a rules-based order.

CSOs extend and deepen social capacity to build more inclusive institutions; analyse and monitor the actions of state and market actors; and participate in multi-sector partnerships. Our capacity to mobilise social capital can lead to improved systems and standards of governance across a range of institutions. Indeed, supporting CSOs can help protect democratic institutions. Strong CSOs are better placed to respond to authoritarianism and populism in developing countries; and can better mobilise resources to respond locally to disasters and drive sustainable development. Equipping us with the resources to perform fast and responsive research projects will make a real difference to the lives of Indo-Pacific communities and the soft power benefits will accrue to Australia.

- c) Australia should fund a visits program that extends opportunities to Australian leaders to experience regional human security challenges first-hand, adopting the model created by Save the Children's Australian Regional Leadership Initiative (ARLI).*

It is often difficult to engage Australian policymakers and publics in informed discussion about human security issues and their various connections with democratic regression as they can be far removed from the experience of many. This discussion is also often hampered by an excessive focus on state security and state institutions, with all discussions of communities refracted through the frame of parliaments, electoral systems, human rights commissions, and the like.

Through our Australian Regional Leadership Initiative (ARLI), Save the Children has been funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation since 2015 to lead parliamentary delegations to see first-hand the delivery of Australian aid and the human security challenges with which Australia is engaged across the Indo-Pacific. To date, we have taken eleven delegations and about 60 parliamentarians to

²⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders on his mission to Australia, A/HRC/37/51/Add.3, 22 October 2018.

see the value of Australian aid for themselves in PNG, Cambodia, Solomon Islands, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Jordan, Lebanon, Fiji and Kenya. We have also included a number of senior Australian journalists and over a dozen senior community members (including representatives from business, academia, sport, media and the faith community) who are engaged in the public policy debate. This program has been effective.

An independent 2020 evaluation of ARLI concluded that the program has been effective in “raising awareness and highlighting the benefits of the aid program within the Australian Federal Parliament. [Further,] there is significant evidence of the initiative improving knowledge and shifting attitudes of alumni.”²⁵ For this reason, we encourage the Australian Government to invest in and increase ARLI’s scale. One avenue for this increase is via a scaled-up alumni engagement program, expanding on the success of recent panel discussions including one on human security challenges in South Asia – and what they mean for Australia’s hopes for regional collaboration via the Quad – late last year.

3. Ensure that Australia’s approach towards promoting democracy and support for the international rules-based order, is underpinned by a principled and consistent approach to international human rights law, including greater assistance for multilateral human rights institutions, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and regularly holding open elections, without interference, are essential elements for democracies. These values are contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Australia is a party. Australia has a long-standing commitment to human rights, as one of the founding members of the UN and having played an active role in drafting the UN Charter. This history and Australia’s commitments under international human rights law, reflect an underlying principle of how Australia engages with the international community.

When employing strategies at Australia’s disposal to uphold human rights, ranging from dialogue and diplomacy to targeted human rights sanctions, it is important that it is done in a principled and consistent manner. Failure to do so will lead to accusations of the use of such measures as an ideological wedge and risk alienating our immediate partners in the region. Australia’s responses will be undermined if we are unwilling to speak up to support norms, standards, and rules, whether that refers to the right to self-determination, respect for the views of children, or the right to survival and development, among other rights.

Save the Children acknowledges that many multilateral institutions which support these values are under increasing strain from strategic competition, with consistent debates on how they should operate and the norms which underpin their activities. This is especially the case in the Indo-Pacific and is also prevalent when it comes to global bodies responsible for promoting democracy and human rights, such as the Human Rights Council, among other mechanisms.²⁶ Australia has an important role to play in helping to ensure that these institutions can uphold their mandates and are provided with appropriate resources to undertake their activities.

²⁵ Tamas Wells. “Australian Regional Leadership Initiative: Review.” September 2020. Available on request.

²⁶ For example, efforts to promote ‘mutually beneficial cooperation’ and downplay the role of civil society in protecting and promoting human rights, through resolution A/HRC/46/L.22 before the Human Rights Council in 2021. The resolution was prepared by China, supported by Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, Syria, and Venezuela. It was adopted by a vote of 26 in favour, 15 against and 6 abstentions.

Some of the primary UN bodies that undertake this function for children is the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Save the Children has had a long-standing positive relationship engagement with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which has consistently demonstrated its value in supporting democracy and human rights in the Indo-Pacific. For example, in March 2020, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child held an in-country and region session for the first time ever in the UN treaty bodies system in Apia, Samoa. More than 100 children, 50 civil society representatives and over 140 government representatives were present.²⁷ These valuable activities help to promote child rights, good governance and the wellbeing of children in the region, but they require significant resources to undertake.

Almost two thirds of UN Human Rights' income come from voluntary contributions from Member States and other donors. The remainder is covered by the UN regular budget. In 2022, Australia ranked 31st on the list of voluntary contributions to the OHCHR, providing US\$358,680. This was well behind many other smaller economies, such as New Zealand, which contributed US\$2,649,052 and even less than the technology company, Microsoft, which contributed US\$600,000.²⁸ Australia should ensure that its financial and in-kind support for the OHCHR, including the valuable work of treaty bodies that promote and protect children's rights, is more commensurate with Australia's ambitions and interests to support our immediate neighbours. There is greater capacity to support the critical institutions that help promote democracy and the rights of children in our region.

²⁷ For further information, see: <https://childrightsconnect.org/samoa/>.

²⁸ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Voluntary Contributions to OHCHR in 2022 as of 30 November 2022. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/VoluntaryContributions2022.pdf>.