



## United Nations Youth Association of Australia

### *Millennium Development Goals*

#### **Preamble:**

The United Nations Youth Association of Australia (UNYA) is a non-profit youth organisation dedicated to encouraging and facilitating participation by young people in the political process. For the past 45 years UNYA has been committed to promoting the ideals and objectives of the United Nations.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were established at the Millennium Summit in 2000 with the purpose of advancing the UN's objective "*to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character*". The MDGs comprise eight targets that are designed to further economic development in the world's most impoverished nations. The eight MDGs are as follows:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
2. Achieve universal primary education;
3. Promote gender equality and empower women;
4. Reduce child mortality;
5. Improve maternal health;
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases;
7. Ensure environmental sustainability;
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

The established deadline for achieving these targets is 2015. In his message on United Nations Day 2008, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon characterised the MDGs as “*our common vision for building a better world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*”. However, the Secretary-General also expressed his regret that “*many countries are still not on track to reach the Millennium Development Goals*”.

As one of Australia’s premier youth organisations, UNYA is concerned by the extent to which the Australian government is contributing to achieving the MDGs. UNYA believes that the goals are fundamentally important for us to achieve as individuals, as a country and as a global community. Furthermore, UNYA advocates that these goals be taken seriously and become a cornerstone of Australia’s foreign policy. This paper outlines UNYA’s position on the MDGs and describes the measures we advocate should be taken to ensure they are accomplished.

**We believe that Australia should increase its international aid budget to 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015.**

In 1970, Australia adopted UN General Assembly Resolution 2626 which declared “*each economically advanced country will progressively increase its official development assistance to the developing countries and will exert its best efforts to reach a minimum net amount of 0.7% of its GDP*”. UNYA believes that Australia should meet this international obligation by increasing its international aid budget to 0.7% of GNI by 2015. Whilst the Australian Government’s current pledge to reach 0.5% of GNI by 2015 is commendable, it falls well short of what Australia can and ought to contribute.

With the prospect of a global recession looming, developing countries stand at risk of rising unemployment, plummeting wages and increasing poverty as a result of lowered global demand for their exported goods. It is therefore essential that, despite global pressures affecting Government revenue, Australia does not reduce foreign aid as the consequences of doing so would be exacerbated by the current global climate. Rather, Australia should increase its international aid budget to minimize such consequences and to reinforce its commitment to achieving the MDGs.

**We support the Australian Government's policy of focusing foreign aid on developing countries in the South-East Asia and Pacific region.**

As the most developed country in the area, Australia holds great responsibility concerning the security and development of the South-East Asia and Pacific region. Australia possesses the ability and resources necessary to significantly impact upon the economic development of poorer nations such as East-Timor and Papua New Guinea. Improved political stability in such nations, as well as increased resources available to combat issues such as religious extremism, terrorism and piracy, would facilitate further international co-operation in the region. Such progress would benefit Australia's international standing, improve standards of living for millions of inhabitants of this region and assist the realisation of all the MDGs.

However, UNYA also believes that Australia's leadership role within our own region should not preclude commitments to assist peoples and nations in other parts of the world in times of need, nor should it limit Australia's willingness to commit to international frameworks and initiatives for aid and development. UNYA believes that Australia must continue to lead in the

region but must maintain a global outlook in relation to ODA and opportunities for multilateral cooperation.

**We commend Australia for lowering trade barriers and for its participation in the Cairns Group.**

Australia was instrumental in the creation of the Cairns Group, a coalition of 19 developed and developing countries established to facilitate a co-operative reduction in trade restrictions. The Australian Government has demonstrated its ongoing commitment to the liberalisation of international trade by implementing trade barriers and agricultural subsidies lower than that of many developed nations, including the United States and the European Union.

UNYA believes that Australia should continue to reduce tariffs and subsidies across all industries, as this will greatly benefit Australia's consumers and trading partners. We also support the Australian Government's continuing diplomatic efforts to restart the Doha Round of trade negotiations. These negotiations aim to create a more equitable system of international trade and thereby promote MDG 8, which is "*to develop a global partnership for international development*".

**We support AusAID taking a more proactive role in encouraging sustainable development.**

The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) should encourage poorer nations to implement sustainable development policies in place of potentially destructive policies. Environmentally harmful practices, such as logging, should be actively discouraged whilst the expansion of sustainable industries such as tourism should be promoted. AusAID's

recent involvement in the deregulation of Papua New Guinea's airline industry exemplifies this approach, as successful lobbying resulted in reduced travel costs and a dramatic increase in tourism to the country. The promotion of such development will directly advance MDG 7, to "*ensure environmental sustainability*", and also contribute to the progression of other MDGs by ensuring living standards can be maintained in the long-term.

We would further recommend that the Australian Government establish a website or labelling scheme to inform consumers about products that have been produced by destructive or unsustainable practices. This will give developing countries an incentive to ensure manufacturing processes are environmentally sound by enabling consumers to identify ethically-produced goods.

**We call for AusAID to be given more resources to analyse the economies of developing countries.**

To ensure that Australia's foreign aid is effective and is directed towards the areas in which it is most required, AusAID must be empowered to find the most effective methods of delivering aid to developing countries. At home, this requires Government willingness and co-operation; whilst abroad it requires extensive consultation both with foreign Governments and with people 'on the ground'. The information gained as a result of such consultation, as well as the sharing of knowledge and findings with Australian NGOs, would result in increased efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of aid.

AusAID should be careful to avoid the flawed former policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by tying aid through 'structural

adjustment loans' to flawed economic theory. Rather, it should utilize broad consultation and form aid-delivery partnerships with the recipients. Furthermore, we encourage the use of 'micro-loan schemes', which give aid-recipients greater ownership of their aid and have proved to be a powerful and effective way to reduce poverty.

### **Actions:**

In response to the concerns outlined in this paper, UNYA undertakes to:

1. Lobby the Australian Government to take action and ensure Australia is contributing to the achievement of the MDGs, in particular:
  - a. Advocating that Australia's international development assistance budget be increased to 0.7% of GNI by 2015;
  - b. Encouraging the Government to direct more resources towards the AusAID organisation in order to ensure Australian aid is as effective as possible;
2. Educate Australian young people and empower them to have their opinions heard by:
  - a. Organising conferences, workshops and school visits to convey the immense importance of the MDGs and allow young people to voice their personal views;
  - b. Running events such as speaker sessions to prompt the youth of Australia to think critically about issues pertaining to global economic development.