



reMAKER MEMO #5

Peace in a time of peril and possibility

A leadership primer for civil society, March 2022



Introduction

How do we talk about peace in a time of invasion, suffering and a world holding its breath?

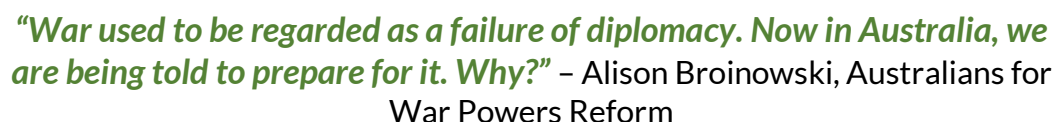
Civil society in Australia has been a strong moral force for peace in the past, and there is much potential – and urgent need – to amplify our voices currently. This memo is designed for leaders in civil society and beyond, to help shape our contribution to the public sphere in perilous times.

Everyone who sees what’s happening in Ukraine right now is appalled and wants to help. We’re also seeing the clear push for a ‘khaki election’ from one side of politics, with the Morrison Government drawing rebukes from its own spy chief for its attempts to weaponise our national security.

As an ex-military friend of Australia reMADE said to us, ‘Australia is not visibly paving the path for peace.’

So we all have a role to play and a right to be in this debate. We know that calling out war-mongering and advocating for peace does not equal a reluctance to stand up to aggressors and bullies, but rather advocating for the lives of innocent people. As citizens and advocates of a free, fair and flourishing world, it’s vital that we articulate the moral landscape in the choices ahead. We also see the links between the desire to protect democracy and its values abroad with the necessary work we champion at home.

The advice in this memo has been developed in consultation with peace, justice and security experts from within the Australia reMADE and Sydney Peace Foundation networks. While we are not military or foreign policy specialists, we are students of politics and history, as well as practitioners of values-based communications. As the situation in Ukraine and beyond evolves rapidly, we offer this memo as a necessarily imperfect, incomplete onramp to a big and important conversation. **We encourage you to circulate this memo and use the language freely where you find it useful.**



“War used to be regarded as a failure of diplomacy. Now in Australia, we are being told to prepare for it. Why?” – Alison Broinowski, Australians for War Powers Reform



Part 1 - Vision

Talk about what we want, not just what we don't want.

Part 2 - Barriers

Reveal how we got here, who benefits.

Part 3 - Solutions

Set an alternative agenda for an active peace.

Part 1 – Vision

Talk about what we want, not just what we don't want.

- **We want better outcomes for people.** Peace, justice and security for humanity.
- **We want Australia to be known and respected as a strong and smart force for peace and justice,** much in the way that Doc Evatt (Australia's first Minister for External Affairs and significant contributor to the development of the United Nations) was known.
- **We want the Australian government to defend and strengthen democracy at home as well as abroad;** to both bolster its moral authority as well as the security and wellbeing of its citizens.
- **We want Australia's leaders to speak in ways that de-escalate the risk of conflict, and to invest in policies and relationships that build the infrastructure of peace and security.**
- **We want our elections to reflect a contest of ideas grounded in truth and commitment to the public good.**

Part 2 – Barriers

Reveal how we got here, who benefits

1. **Reject the false choice between escalation and appeasement.**

It is not a simple choice between endless arms-escalation and capitulation to dictators and bullies. Australia's government [needs to embrace a much broader view of security](#). *There are many smart ways to be strong. There are many ways to stand up for human rights, peace, freedom and democracy. Prevention is better than war.* So as citizens, journalists, advocates and other stakeholders we get to ask, loudly and responsibly: what does the infrastructure of peace look like? Are our leaders doing enough on all fronts to pave a path to greater peace, justice and security?



2. Reject the argument that more war is now inevitable.

Almost no one wants war. Not the Russian people. Not the Ukrainian people. Not the Chinese people. Not the Australian, European or American people – and so on. Repeat this, often. *We must reject the implied ‘war is strength’ or ‘war is inevitable’ argument, and be clear that war itself represents failure in all but the most extreme circumstances (eg, responding to invasion).* We should demand loudly that the people have a say, through a vote by their elected representatives in a joint sitting of Parliament, before our country commits its citizens and soldiers to a conflict abroad. We should not be led into war as though we had no other brave or humane choice.

3. Reject the creeping militarisation of our politics, and the ‘military must be the answer’ frame.

From covid to aged care to floods, the Morrison Government’s default has been to ignore the signs of trouble, demands and advice from actual experts – then call in the military at the 11th hour to do someone else’s job. Now they’ve announced plans to [grow our military to its largest size since the Vietnam War](#). They position the military as a one-size-fits-all solution and Australia’s only kind of strength.

4. Reveal who benefits from a culture of war and why.

In part, that means calling out cynical, self-serving politics that plays on people's fears. But it’s also about following the money. Whether it’s a political party sliding in the polls pre-election or a [secretive, aggressively expansionist domestic arms industry](#), we should never allow naked self-interest to ‘[wag the dog](#)’. There are real threats, real atrocities and aggressors; but there are also those who talk up conflict to distract from other failings or serve profit-driven motives. Trust is a precious resource in perilous times, and Australia’s leaders must tread carefully with ours.

Part 3 – Solutions

Set an alternative agenda for an active peace

1. Talk about peace as a public good.

Reframe peace, justice, wellbeing and a safe planet are firmly in our national interest. Talk about ways for Australia to be strong and smart diplomats for peace and security abroad, including:

- Repairing our reputation with key allies as honest brokers;
- Rapidly scaling up our diplomatic footprint to promote peace, prevent violent conflict and help resolve complex protracted crises in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and Myanmar;
- Funding (rather than cutting) peace infrastructure – delivering on our UN Millennium Goal promise to allocate 0.7% of our Gross National Income (GNI) to foreign aid; and



- Helping to end the Fossil Fuel era (a key demand from Ukrainian civil society) and bring the climate crisis to an end – to both rapidly reduce harm to people and planet AND to reduce the power of men like Putin to hold the world ransom.

2. Highlight the ways our leaders can strengthen and defend peace and democracy here at home, such as:

- Establishing a credible [National Integrity Commission](#);
- Ensuring appropriate scrutiny, oversight and distance from the arms industry (see Australian Democracy Network's latest report, [Confronting State Capture](#));
- Maintaining the Australian War Memorial as a place for remembrance and reflection, not a 'weapons museum' (see [criticism of expansion plans](#));
- Heeding the rebukes by ASIO that politicising national security '[is not helpful](#)' (Morrison [withdrew his 'Manchurian candidate' slur](#) but hasn't apologised; the [khaki election playbook](#) has been well under way for some time).
- Committing to a referendum in the next term of government on establishing a First Nations' Voice to Parliament as per the [Uluru Statement](#), which itself is a peace offering;
- Reforming our political donations laws, whistleblower protections and winding back anti-democratic restrictions on protest and advocacy;
- Addressing poverty here in Australia as an affront to peace and justice, and a threat to our economic and social cohesion ([Australia currently has the 16th highest poverty rate out of the 34 wealthiest countries in the OECD](#) – higher than the UK, Germany and NZ); and
- Depoliticising human rights, introducing a Human Rights Bill, funding and supporting human rights institutions.

3. Champion the non-military ways Australia can help over the coming months, including:

- We should welcome Ukrainians [without restrictions on the need to work or have access to healthcare](#);
- Use this opportunity to reset our national relationship with refugees more broadly to one of respect, admiration, humanity and wholehearted support;
- Organise highly visible peace marches and demonstrations of solidarity with citizens protesting war in Russia, Europe and around the world; and
- Renew the attention and public conversation around conflicts and war-ravaged countries that are not in the media (eg, Afghanistan and Syria).



4. Tell the stories of how Australia has been an active force for good in the world.

Australia's history includes genocide and ongoing colonialism, which we have not yet sufficiently acknowledged and addressed as a nation. But we are also a successful multicultural country, home to the world's oldest continuing cultures, with a history of standing for peace in bold and powerful ways. Many of the modern stories of Australian peace-waging are largely unknown and under-celebrated (there is no National Peace Memorial museum with a multi-million dollar budget). Tell these stories, including:

- How Australians 100 years ago played a leading role in advancing the public goods of women's suffrage and labour rights, as well as voting against conscriptions twice in WWI (one of only three participating countries that didn't rely on the draft);
- How Australians were instrumental in developing the Charter of the United Nations, prohibiting the use of chemical warfare, protesting against the wars in Vietnam and Iraq and resisting the expansion of nuclear power (and its inextricable links to nuclear weapons) – the latter notably led by Indigenous communities;
- How the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear weapons (ICAN), founded in Australia in 2007, won the Nobel Peace Prize ten years later for 'ground-breaking efforts' to secure the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons; and
- How research finds most Australians would prefer public money earmarked for the expansion of the Australian War Memorial to be spent on services such as health and education (50%) or veterans' support services (26%).


Conclusion

Australia can be a [proud contributor to a just world](#). This is what Australians want and deserve. This is not to dismiss real fears and real threats, but to address them. Furthermore, we utterly reject any government of ours, as well as others with access and power, attempting to exploit fears and threats for their own power or profit.


It was Kofi Annan in his report to the UN General Assembly in 2000 who noted:

"Human security, in its broadest sense, embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her potential.

Every step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict. Freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment – these are the interrelated building blocks of human – and therefore national – security."



Peace with justice takes work, commitment and resourcing. It takes courage, strength and collaboration. The foundations must be laid deep and wide, tended to carefully, built upon thoughtfully and bolstered against attack and decay by each generation of leaders and citizens. This is our work in this time of peril and possibility.




Australia is a nation that came into being through war and invasion. It is difficult to talk about Australia's role as a peaceful nation internationally when we have unresolved conflict here ourselves.

There is work to be done for peace in this country to resolve our roots of genocide and colonisation.

We support the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#), an offering from a collective of First Nations Peoples as a path from which to start our own peace process in this country.

Living, loving and working across this country, we respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay respect to elders both past and present.



Australia reMADE exists to support ambitious, collaborative, and transformative change-makers to reMAKE more of the world we want. We are independent, not-for-profit and here for anyone who aligns with our [vision](#) and values. To get in touch, contact info@AustraliareMADE.org.