

Parliamentary Group on Population & Development

Spring 2006



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1st Roundtable Discussion on Sexual & Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Australian Aid Program - *The Way Forward*

The first Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (PGPD) Roundtable Discussion on 'Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals in the Australian Aid Program' was held in Parliament House on Monday 14 August.

The Chair of the PGPD, the Hon Dr Sharman Stone, said the discussions reflected a growing awareness by parliamentarians of "the importance of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) to the achievement of prosperity and stability in developing nations, and a growing demand for more information and discussion on the subject".

In her opening speech Dr Stone remarked that the world is nearly half way towards the deadline of the MDGs and "we are nowhere near halving world poverty".

Dr Stone also stated that SRH underpins the achievement of all the MDGs, highlighting a recent UN Millennium Project report which underscored that investing in better SRH greatly helped to combat HIV-AIDS, promote gender equality, improve maternal and child health, and alleviate poverty.



The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP

Dr Sharon Camp—CEO of the US based Guttmacher Institute that provides global statistics and advocacy on SRH—was the keynote speaker and gave the first presentation entitled *The Return on Investment in Sexual and Reproductive Health*.

"Nearly one-fifth of the worldwide burden of disease and early death is due to poor SRH," Dr Camp said.

The Roundtable was the first such public discussion held by the PGPD in its 10-year history, and is to be followed by a second session on Monday 11 September.

"One of the goals of our parliamentary group is to make sure that Australia is one of the leading contributors in the world in terms of supporting... reproductive health in the region, and we still have a way to go."

*The Hon Dr Sharman Stone,
Chair of the PGPD*



Mr Bob McMullan MP

Dr Sharon Camp

Senator Lyn Allison

PAPUA NEW GUINEA STUDY TOUR

MDG 8—preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS—focus of April PNG study tour by Australian & New Zealand Parliamentarians

Unified government leadership—including open, multi-party leadership on stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS—is critical to achieving the MDGs in Papua New Guinea (PNG). This is one of the key themes that emerged during the PGPD and New Zealand Parliamentarians' Group on Population and Development (NZPPD) study tour to PNG from 8-15 April 2006.



Duncan Kerr visiting Zumara Primary School, Lae

PGPD member the Hon Duncan Kerr SC MP accompanied NZPPD members Steve Chadwick, Paul Hutchison and Tim Barnett on the week-long visit.

“Our task was to consider and report on what can be done to better help PNG meet one of the eight Millennium Development Goals –preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS,” reported Mr Kerr following his visit.



Ad campaign highlighting importance of condoms in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The delegates met with the Governor of Morobe and Dr Puka Temu, the Minister assisting the Prime Minister on HIV/AIDS, who has called for 100% condom use to help halt the epidemic.



Duncan Kerr with Luther Wenge, Governor of Morobe

“Papua New Guinea’s government and the international aid community need to take a more active role focussed on primary health care, education and promotion of safe sex if the virus [HIV/AIDS] is to be tackled effectively.”

The Hon Duncan Kerr SC MP



Duncan Kerr at a woman’s only microfinance scheme, Bumange Settlement

The group also met with Dame Carol Kidu—Minister for Community Development—and toured her electorate of Moresby South.



Dame Carol Kidu MP in her electorate of Moresby South

As well as official meetings, delegates visited hospitals, schools, villages, community groups and non-government organisations.

Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)

4th Asian Women Parliamentarians' & Ministers' Conference, New Zealand

“Gender Responsive Governance – the key to the population & development agenda.”

PGPD Vice Chairs Senator Claire Moore and Senator Lyn Allison and NSW PGPD member the Hon Robyn Parker MLC attended the Asian-Pacific Women Parliamentarians' and Ministers' Conference in June in Wellington, New Zealand. Around 70 women parliamentarians and ministers from Asia/Pacific region attended the conference.

Both Senator Moore and Senator Allison gave presentations at the session entitled *Governance at the national level – successes and barriers across the region*. Senator Allison reviewed debate in Australia about the approval process of the abortion pill, RU486, and Senator Moore gave a summary of the AusAID White Paper and the role of the PGPD.

The participants formulated a collective action plan which outlined strategies to address gender

disparities in the region that each participant could take back to their own countries and implement through parliamentary processes.



The Hon Robyn Parker MLC, Senator Lyn Allison and Senator Claire Moore

AFPPD Focus Group on HIV/AIDS and Domestic Violence, Vietnam

PGPD members the Hon Dr Meredith Burgmann MLC (NSW Parliament) and the Hon Louise Pratt MLC (WA Parliament) attended the focus group on HIV/AIDS and domestic violence in December.

The meeting brought together experts from UNFPA and UNIFEM, Vietnamese Government officials and parliamentarians. The meeting covered issues such as current trends in HIV, lessons learned in policy and programs, harm reduction, and factors contributing to domestic violence.

“Parliamentarians are most effective as resource mobilisers – they make decisions on where money is spent. They can make decisions on funding education programs, [and] television campaigns.”

The Hon Dr Meredith Burgmann MLC

Participants also had the opportunity to visit the Community Counselling and Support Centre for People Living with HIV/AIDS at the District 8 Health Centre.

At the end of the meeting Dr Burgmann and Ms Pratt made a commitment to assist the East Timorese parliamentarians with setting up a Parliamentary Group as well as working on domestic violence in Australian indigenous communities. The speeches and report from the meeting are available on the PGPD website.



The Hon Louise Pratt MLC at session on “Harm Reduction”



The Hon Dr Meredith Burgmann MLC

PGPD ACTIVITIES

PGPD MISSION

“We work to mobilise political will in addressing discrimination and violence against women and to reverse the appallingly high rates of maternal deaths and disability by advocating for safe reproductive health care services.

We also affirm that integrated reproductive health care and HIV/AIDS policies and practices are a critical tool for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the empowerment of women in our region.”

PGPD Meetings in 2006

Dr Steve Sinding

In March, Dr Steve Sinding, Executive Director International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF) addressed the PGPD on IPPF’s Global Safe Abortion Program and their five A’s campaign; Adolescents, AIDS, Advocacy, Abortion and Access. Dr Sinding also met with NSW PGPD members whilst he was in Sydney.



The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP and Senator Lyn Allison with Dr Steve Sinding

The White Paper

In May, Bruce Davis, Director General, AusAID, attended the PGPD meeting to brief the group about the key initiatives in the White Paper on Australia’s overseas aid program and the 2006 AusAID budget.

Of particular interest to the PGPD is gender equality, an additional investment in health strategies—including addressing the health needs of women and children—and an increased engagement by Australian parliamentarians and political parties with their counterparts in the region.

The PGPD welcomes the greater focus on gender equality and sexual & reproductive health in the White Paper.

Submission on Pregnancy Support

In August, the PGPD were briefed on the Federal Government’s Pregnancy Support Measures. Following this meeting, the PGPD prepared a submission for the Department of Health and Ageing.

Upcoming Meetings

At the coming meeting in September the PGPD will be briefed by a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark regarding Denmark’s strategy on ‘The Promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.’ Also, the Chair of the Indigenous Australians’ Sexual Health Committee (IASHC) will brief the group on the status of Indigenous Sexual & Reproductive Health in Australia.

PGPD elects a new Chair

In February this year Michael Johnson MP stepped down as Chair of the PGPD. Mr Johnson had served as Chair for two years and his contribution and support in this role is greatly valued.

The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP, Minister for Workforce Participation, was elected unopposed as the new Chair of the PGPD.

Dr Stone has been a member of the PGPD since 1997. She has taken a lead role in raising awareness of population and reproductive health issues for the PGPD. Last year she was a representative at the 21st Asian Parliamentarians Meeting on Population and Development: Population in Emergency in Cambodia.



The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP chairing a session at the 21st Asian Parliamentarians’ Meeting on Population and Development