

**STATEMENT OF WELCOME AND SUPPORT FOR DR THORAYA OBAID,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UNFPA AND UNDER SECRETARY GENERAL
TO THE UNITED NATIONS.**

Welcome

On behalf of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development I warmly welcome the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Under Secretary General of the United Nations, Dr Thoraya Obaid.

We also extend this very warm welcome to your delegation, Safiye Cagar, Director of Information and Resources, Najib Assifi, Representative of the UNFPA office for the Pacific and Kae Ishikawa, Resource Mobilization Officer.

We are indeed privileged to have Dr. Obaid with us today. Dr Obaid is a leading figure in international aid and development, particularly in relation to population and development and she is the first Saudi Arabian woman to head a UN organisation. Dr. Obaid has a strong reputation as a pioneer for the education of women. The Population fund depends on donations from over 100 countries of which Australia is one.

The Australian Parliamentary Group and the UNFPA have much in common.

We are both committed to approaches in population and development that centre on respect for human rights, gender equality, and improved rights for women and men including the right to decide on the size and spacing of their families.

We recognize that when women are supported by investments in family planning and reproductive health care, their whole family is freed from poverty. We also recognise that

over 500,000 women each year die from obstetric complications and that the family, community and environmental implications of this are enormous.

Dr, Obaid; as a group we are committed to supporting your efforts to eliminate this figure that is far too high.

East Timor

The Australian Parliamentary Group congratulates the UNFPA on the wonderful work it is doing in our region including in East Timor, which as you know, is on our very doorstep and has one of the world's highest maternal mortality and fertility rates. We express our support and gratitude for the overwhelming task you are undertaking.

HIV/AIDS

In January of this year, Michael Johnson MP, the chair of our Group, attended the Sub-Regional South Asian Parliamentary Seminar on HIV/AIDS in Pakistan, where he spoke about the international efforts to scale up treatments, care and support.

In October 2004 UNFPA and other partners arranged the "First Pacific Parliamentarians Meeting on HIV/AIDS" where Parliamentarians from 16 Pacific countries agreed on strategies to reduce HIV in our region. As you may be aware Australia has committed some serious funds to combating HIV/AIDS with our Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer taking a particular role in campaigning for a comprehensive response in the region to HIV/AIDS through the establishment of a \$600 million aid program. Mr Downer also chaired the first ever regional summit on HIV/AIDS which was hosted in Australia in 2001, and co-chaired the second regional summit on HIV/AIDS in Thailand in 2004. The APG acknowledges that we can play a leading role in mobilizing awareness and greater understanding about how this disease particularly affects the poor and young

women and the steps that we as individuals and as a Group can take to combat ignorance and shame that surrounds this disease.

APG activities

A member of our Group, Senator Lyn Allison attended the tenth anniversary of the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development in Strasbourg last year where she and other parliamentarians from around the world renewed their support for the ICPD Programme of Action and highlighted the importance of implementing the Cairo consensus and the leading role of UNFPA in fulfilling the Cairo Agenda through the Millennium Development Goals.

This afternoon we are also joined by another member of our group, Kelly Hoare MP, who is the Chair of the Standing Committee for Women on the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians for Population and Development. Kelly was instrumental in ensuring the success of the **Asian Women Parliamentarians and Ministers Conference** held here at Parliament House last year with a theme of 'Women Empowerment and Gender Equality: Implementation of the Cairo Agenda'. Over 80 women from Asian countries participated in this event and we were proud to host it. The Canberra Declaration signed by Parliamentarians at that meeting **reaffirmed** the International Conference on Population and Development and the cornerstone principles of population and development related programmes - advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, the elimination of all kinds of violence against women and ensuring control of their own fertility.

UNFPA activities

As Executive Director of the UNFPA, you oversee the world's largest source of funding for population and reproductive health programmes in over 140 countries world-wide. This includes field offices in 23 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and two sub-regional offices in Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

In addition to this programming, UNFPA's response to the recent Tsunami has been extensive. The Boxing Day Tsunami ravaged coastal settlements in many Asian countries and left hundreds of thousands homeless and without hope. In the aftermath of such emergencies displaced women and young people are among the most vulnerable and are at high risk from diseases, lack of health services, trafficking and violence. UNFPA's emergency response has targeted these weakest groups.

It has set up special offices and has shipped hygiene kits, medicines, medical equipment and supplies into the region; is supporting psychosocial counselling for women and adolescents; providing funding to re-establish the provincial National Family Planning networks and has identified the thousands of pregnant women living in temporary settlements as a key priority.

The UNFPA is actively advocating for the protection of these women against violence which is commonplace during such disasters and is providing them with safe access to basic health services.

Statement of Support

The APPGPD wishes to reiterate our support for UNFPA and the work it is doing in the Asia Pacific region and throughout the world.

We are keen to endorse the link between the ICPD Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals recognising that the Goals cannot be achieved without including reproductive health and rights in the targets and indicators.

We further recognize that individual parliamentarians are important actors in supporting and fulfilling the ICPD Programme of Action and helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

As a Group, we will continue our commitment to working for increased support for the ICDP Programme of Action in the Australian Parliament; to support legislation that promotes good reproductive health care both domestically and internationally; and to encourage other parliamentarians to actively engage in these commitments.

Dr. Obaid; we wish you and your delegation a warm welcome and a wonderful stay in our nation's capital.