

Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development

Chair: Mrs Ann Sudmalis MP

Vice Chair: Senator Claire Moore

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Since 1995, the Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (APGPD) has worked across party lines to champion women's empowerment, break down gender discrimination, and advocate for women's right to access quality reproductive health services through Australia's foreign policy engagement. We recognise the empowerment of women and girls as central to driving successful and sustainable development globally. We are also part of a global network of parliamentary groups on population and development that similarly connect parliamentarians across party lines and country borders to work cooperatively on our shared vision.

Since 2000, our vision and remit has been guided by the Millennium Development Goals, and since 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals, as outlined in the Group's 'Rules and Objectives'.

The APGPD is pleased to provide a submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Enquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Inquiry. We thank the Government for the opportunity to share our vision.

Specifically, the APGPD would like the Australian Government to share our commitment to achieving gender equality and women and girls' empowerment, and as an important part of that, ensuring that women and girls' reproductive health needs are met. This means contributing to global efforts to achieve Goal 5 and Goal 3's targets to significantly reduce maternal mortality and to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, information and products (targets 3.1 and 3.7). Beyond these specific Goals, gender equality is core to enabling progress across the entire SDG roadmap.

We recognise that the new agenda includes domestic planning and policies as well as international development. We therefore need a strong focus across all levels of government, with DFAT steering our international engagement and leadership, and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet coordinating our whole-of-government response domestically.

Australia's contribution to global efforts

Despite significant reductions in Australia's overseas development assistance budget over the last four years, we commend the Australian Government's strong focus on gender equality and women's empowerment in the aid program and across our diplomatic and trading relationships.

We are pleased to see that these issues, as well as support for sexual and reproductive health and rights, feature strongly in key foreign policy documents, including:

- DFAT's *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy*,ⁱ
- DFAT's *Humanitarian Strategy*,ⁱⁱ
- the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade report *Empowering Women*,ⁱⁱⁱ and

- in the Australian Government's many years of diplomatic advocacy at the Commission on the Status of Women.

In addition, we commend the Ambassador for Women and Girls' announcement at the 2017 Family Planning Summit for an additional \$30 million for sexual and reproductive health programming in the Pacific.

We recommend the Government continue to build on this agenda, channelling our diplomatic, trade and aid efforts towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5. We aspire to an Australia that stands out as a global leader for gender equality, women's empowerment and reproductive health and rights.

We further recommend that our aid program continue to support the provision of SRH services in humanitarian emergencies and prioritise SRH support for regions where maternal mortality and the need for contraception is highest. Access to quality reproductive services has a transformative impact on women's health, education and empowerment and is therefore essential to gender equality.

Australia's national commitments

Australia is a world-leader in gender equality and access to quality reproductive health services. However, we must address the pockets of deep disadvantage and embrace the guiding principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: *leave no one behind*.

Australia's ability to act as a global leader would be enhanced by our achievements at home.

We lead best when we lead by example.

Our aim should be that we are seen as a nation where everyone, no matter where they are nor where they come from, can enjoy the same access to quality services.

Rural and regional areas, indigenous and migrant communities, people with disabilities, all face varying levels of disadvantage in accessing health services, in escaping from gender-based violence, and accessing opportunities, to name just a few key issues, which we endeavour to resolve and should continue to do so.

We recommend that the Australian Government continue to champion gender equality, women and girls' empowerment, and sexual and reproductive rights, including by continuing to support high-quality services, including evidence-based reproductive health information and services.

We further recommend that the Government continue to provide targeted support for disadvantaged groups to reduce inequality and unfair poor health outcomes.

ⁱ DFAT Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, February 2016. States: 'A focus of health programming will support universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.' And commits to, when 'assisting governments and organisations to prevent violence against women and children, [to] support and advocate for [a] strong focus on protection and promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights in humanitarian emergencies and responses.'

ⁱⁱ DFAT Humanitarian Strategy, May 2016. Commits to 'promote international good practice and ensure partners implement and report against the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender Marker and use the Minimum Initial Services Package (MISP) for Sexual and Reproductive Health at the onset of a humanitarian emergency.'

ⁱⁱⁱ The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Empowering women and girls: the human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean–Asia Pacific region*. December 2015. Including the recommendation (11) that ‘the Australian Government maintain funding and support for reproductive health programs, including obstetric and gynaecological services, across the Indo–Pacific region with an increased focus on the Pacific and Timor-Leste’.