



Australian Council for International Development

Submission to the Parliamentary Roundtable: Ending Gender-based Violence in the Asia-Pacific Region

March 2011

About the Australian Council for International Development

ACFID is the peak council for Australian not-for-profit aid and development organisations, working towards a world where gross inequality and extreme poverty are eradicated. ACFID has over 70 members who operate in over 100 developing countries worldwide.

With over 45 years of experience working collaboratively with communities and governments, we bring a critical perspective on international development issues to discussions with the Australian Government. We also enjoy the respect and support of the Australian community. In 2009, 1.08 million Australians were regular donors to Australian development NGOs and community donations totaled over \$800 million. This figure represents about 73% of all funds raised by the sector.

The sector is a partner with the Australian Government in delivering humanitarian aid, operating on the ground in developing countries alongside government agencies and working in some countries where there is no other Australian presence.

ACFID administers a rigorous Code of Conduct which represents the active commitment of 120 Australian overseas aid organisations to strive for best practice in the areas of integrity, transparency and accountability.

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ACFID Member Organisations

40K Foundation Australia	Australian Volunteers International	Live & Learn Environmental Education
Act for Peace – National Council of Churches Australia	Baptist World Aid Australia	Mercy Works Inc.
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Australian Business Volunteers	Global Development Group	Quaker Service Australia
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Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific	International Centre for Eyecare Education	Save the Children Australia
Australian Lutheran World Service	International Christian Aid Relief Enterprises Limited	Sexual Health & Family Planning Australia
Australian Marist Solidarity Ltd	International Help Fund Australia	TEAR Australia
Australian Medical Aid Foundation	International Nepal Fellowship (Aust) Ltd	Transparency International Australia
Australian Reproductive Health Alliance	International Women's Development Agency	Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA
Australian Respiratory Council	Interplast Australia & New Zealand	UnitingWorld
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	Leprosy Mission Australia, The	World Education Australia Limited
		World Vision Australia
		WWF Australia

Executive Summary

“When women are not protected, it undermines families, communities, and even nations.”

- Hillary Clinton, November 2010, Melbourne¹

Addressing violence against women and girls is at the heart of supporting women to realise their human rights – and a core development issue. Gender violence remains a devastating reality in all parts of the world. According to a 2006 study from the UN Secretary-General, “Violence against women is the most common but least punished crime in the world.”² **Among women aged 15-44 years, violence accounts for more death and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic injuries and war put together.**³ This has enormous costs.

ACFID applauds recent announcements by the Australian Government to provide \$14.5 million to UN Women over the next two years to address violence against women⁴ and an additional \$300,000 for training to United Nations Peacekeepers in how to protect women from sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.⁵ However, more needs to be done. ACFID makes the following recommendations aimed at achieving Millennium Development Goal 3, promoting gender equality and empowering women, specifically in the regions of Asia and the Pacific:

Recommendation 1 – Creation of an Ambassador for Women’s Rights

Recommendation 2 – Fully fund the implementation of the recommendations in the Government’s Report: *Stop Violence: Responding to Violence against Women in Melanesia and Timor Leste*

Recommendation 3 – Release and fully resource the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan

Australia is in the unique position of being able to play a leadership role in promoting the rights of women and girls in Asia and the Pacific, and we believe these three recommendations will help Australia to partner with our neighbours to create change in this region.



Dr Meredith Burgmann

President



Marc Purcell

Executive Director

¹ Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State (6 November 2010) *Joint Press Conference with Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kevin Rudd MP*, Grand Hyatt Hotel, Melbourne.

² International Women’s Development Agency, <http://www.iwda.org.au/au/programs/promote-safety-security/> (accessed November 2010).

³ World Health Organisation (2005) sourced from the International Women’s Development Agency, <http://www.iwda.org.au/au/programs/promote-safety-security/> (accessed November 2010).

⁴ The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs (6 November 2010) *Joint Press Conference with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton*, Grand Hyatt Hotel, Melbourne.

⁵ Joint Media Release, The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and The Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for the Status of Women, *Keeping women safe in war – 10th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*.

Recommendation 1 - Creation of an Ambassador for Women's Rights

ACFID recommends the creation of an Ambassador for Women's Rights, located in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and supported by appropriate staffing, to champion gender equality and promote the eradication of violence against women in the region, with a remit to investigate resourcing issues and innovative approaches to eliminating violence.

The US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues heads the Office on Global Women's Issues in the US Department of State.⁶ The position was created by the Obama administration in 2009. The first ambassador-at-large is Melanne Verwee, who has served from April 2009.

The US Ambassador-at-Large has been extremely successful in foregrounding of women's rights. She has raised the profile and work of many women's organisations around the world,⁷ as well as adding a policy depth to the work of the State Department.

An Ambassador for Women's Rights based on this model would assist in drawing attention to this key development issue both in Australia and our region. In particular, an Ambassador for Women's Rights would help to navigate the cultural and religious issues surrounding violence against women in our region.

Why is an Ambassador for Women's Rights in our region important?

1. An Ambassador could **draw diplomatic attention** to the lack of political representation of women in the region, especially the Pacific, in a depersonalised and safe manner. Women advocates have asked our Parliament to make this a focus, most recently in the Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade.⁸

The inquiry heard evidence that only two per cent of women are elected leaders in local, provincial and national positions Pacific —the lowest percentage in the world. Witnesses suggested that this lack of representation means that issues of relevance to women are less likely to be tackled. For example, it noted that the Pacific is one of the regions not on track to meet Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the areas of the education of girls and maternal health.

2. It serves as a **statement of values** for Australian foreign policy. The US, Canada and the Nordic countries have elevated the role of gender equality as a key foreign policy issue. As Hillary Rodham Clinton said of the Ambassador position: "When I talk about why we need to integrate women's issues into discussions at the highest levels everywhere in the world, ... I'm doing it because it's in the vital interest of the United States of America."⁹
3. It draws **local and international media attention** to issues of women's rights in context. For example, the UN Transitional Administration in Timor Leste gave media space only to parties

⁶ <http://www.state.gov/s/gwi/>

⁷ For example, in a recent visit to India – see <http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/News-in-Brief/2010/Sep/United-States-Ambassador-at-Large-for-Global-Womens-Issues-Visits-an-IFES-Program.aspx>

⁸ http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfad/asia_pacific_hr/report.htm

⁹ <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/12/152670.htm>

who fielded women candidates in the 2000 elections. Timor Leste has one of the highest rates of women's participation in Parliament in our region.

4. Australia could **listen and learn** from our neighbours. Australia still has much to learn about the way gender issues play out in our region, and many issues are shared, such as domestic violence. Sex Discrimination Commissioner Liz Broderick started her appointment with a listening tour of Australia, and let that tour inform her agenda. This would be the way forward for an Ambassador.
5. The Ambassador could offer a degree of **support, safety and profile for individual advocates** for gender equality, who face insecurity in their community when they challenge current power dynamics. We have seen this play out in Iran and Afghanistan with some prominent female leaders.

Recommendation 2 – Fully fund the implementation of the recommendations in the Government's Report: *Stop Violence: Responding to Violence against Women in Melanesia and Timor Leste*

Stop Violence: Responding to Violence against Women in Melanesia and Timor Leste is the Government's response to a report of AusAID's Office of Development Effectiveness on promising practices to address violence against women.¹⁰ Released in 2009, many of the recommendations of the Response are yet to be funded.

ACFID recommends the full funding and implementation of the recommendations in the Government Response, and supports further similar initiatives in Asia. The Response includes practical recommendations to improve women's access to justice and support services, such as funding a range of in-country civil society organisations that are providing key services to prevent and address violence, and initiatives relating to male leadership, economic livelihoods, safe houses, and legal, health and policing reforms.

Australia is well placed to play a leadership role in responding to violence against women in Asia and the Pacific, with significant policy, legal and services expertise and experience about what works in the region such as long-term, predictable support for agencies like the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. Implementing locally-driven, culturally sensitive and appropriate initiatives as a core part of our country strategies, as suggested in the Response, is one way to achieve this.

Such initiatives could include a range of culturally appropriate interventions to prevent violence against women, with a focus on embedding relevant prevention activities into existing community-based services so they become part of mainstream service provision. Other initiatives could address alcohol use and gender-based violence¹¹ looking to improve the evidence base on this issue by

¹⁰ *Stop Violence: Responding to Violence against Women in Melanesia and Timor Leste*, 2009, is an Australian Government response to the AusAID Office of Development Effectiveness (ODA) Report *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*.

¹¹ Currently there are no direct budget allocations for responding to alcohol-related issues in Australia's aid budget, however some bilateral programs provide small amounts to limited community based responses. Current data linking alcohol and violence is abundant,

synthesising current research, and developing and piloting interventions that address alcohol use as a strategy to reduce the incidence of gender-based violence.

Innovative initiatives such as the UNIFEM Pacific Facility Fund could be given further support. Consideration could also be given to further supporting creative approaches that have proved successful, including use of accessible and popular forms of communication to raise and challenge violence against women, such as through television drama, radio and theatre. For example, One News TV in the Solomon Islands and the Wan Smol Bag theatre group in Vanuatu use popular forms of communication to raise an issue that is often hidden in communities, encouraging discussion and community action. Australia could also make a contribution to the available information on prevalence and incidence of violence against women by assisting national statistical offices to regularly collect data, using a recognised methodology such as that used by the World Health Organisation.

Recommendation 3 – Release and fully resource the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan

In October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, backing it up with further resolutions on the theme in recent years. UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 recognises the relevance of women’s experiences of conflict in peace processes and in conflict resolution, and the importance of seeing women as active participants rather than simply as victims. Australia is committed to adopting a national action plan to give effect to SCR 1325, following the example of 23 other countries including Canada and the United Kingdom.

ACFID recommends that the Australian Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan be released in conjunction with the full resourcing required for its implementation.

While the Australian Government has acted on SCR 1325 in several ways, there are currently no broad whole-of-government guidelines for integrating gender into peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. Australia’s key role assisting Pacific nations in post-conflict reconstruction and peacekeeping – along with peacekeeping and troop commitments in various conflict zones across the globe and in Timor-Leste – necessitates a national plan of action to implement SCR 1325. This would see the role of women in peace and security explicitly recognised by the Australian Government and ensure that consideration of gender in peace and conflict issues becomes a central obligation and an active consideration in the Australian community’s response to our military and defence commitments.

ACFID recognises and applauds current initiatives within the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to ensure targets for women’s inclusion in deployments and training on women’s rights. To bolster this commitment, **ACFID recommends full reviews of AFP and ADF policies, practices, operations and resourcing in light of the new National Action Plan.**

and while data specifically for the Pacific is scarce, anecdotal reports of harmful consumption and negative consequences of alcohol use are common.

Australia has been closely involved in the promotion of SCR 1325 in the Pacific region through AusAID programs. For example, peacekeepers and other support staff deployed to RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands) take part in pre-deployment training which examines SCR 1325 as an essential tool in increasing the participation of women in decision making. AusAID also support a number of NGOs promoting SCR 1325 in the region – including through femLINKpacific’s Peace Talks program to promote discussion about 1325 and other gender equality issues in the Pacific via radio.

ACFID recommends that Australia further its regional commitment to SCR 1325 by assisting developing nations in our region to draft their own national action plans. The Australian Government could consider partnering with organisations such as femLINKpacific and UNDP Pacific in order to assist in the facilitation of regional engagement in drafting National Action Plans.