

IN BRIEF

NEW PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY



Teresa Gambaro is the new Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer. She was appointed to the position vacated by Bruce Billson in February 2006.

Ms Gambaro is from the electorate of Petrie in the outer northern suburbs of Brisbane. She has been in the Federal Parliament for 10 years. As well as assisting in the aid and foreign affairs portfolio, Ms Gambaro takes on the mantle of Australia's Special Representative on Mine Action.

Landmines and other forms of explosive remnants of war continue to cause devastation to individuals and affected communities. Australia is one of the original signatories of the 1997 Mine Ban Convention and will preside over an international meeting of countries party to the Mine Ban Convention in Geneva later this year.

'I am proud of Australia's record in helping countries like Cambodia reduce landmine casualty rates. By supporting clearance of unexploded ordnance, raising awareness and providing

assistance to survivors, we are helping people build new lives for themselves. We are also making cleared land productive again,' says Ms Gambaro.

As a Queenslander, the new Parliamentary Secretary has been particularly shocked by the damage caused by Cyclone Larry. 'Seeing such terrible devastation makes me appreciate the complexity of emergency and reconstruction phases in disaster responses. People living in developing countries are not able to call on the same level of resources we can and consequently require assistance from outside. Time and again, Australia has responded readily and generously to such needs.'

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs Teresa Gambaro (*top of table*), at the release of the latest report on post tsunami reconstruction progress, Parliament House, Canberra. The 12-month report released by ACFID (Australian Council for International Development) outlines the performance of the 30 Australian non-government aid agencies engaged in the work. Photo: AUSPIC

FIELD TRIP TO BURMA



A team from AusAID has recently returned from a field trip to the remote Wa region of northern Shan State, Burma. Vulnerable families, many of whom are from ethnic minority groups, are receiving much needed food assistance through food for work, food for education, and food for training activities. AusAID supports these activities under the World Food Programme's Emergency Food Assistance to Vulnerable Families Program.

TOP: Kachin people from Nar Tee Village attend a food for training workshop. These villagers are learning about 'sloping agricultural land technology', which is a new method of cultivating food crops in less fertile upland areas. Villagers experience chronic food shortages through large parts of the year. Photo: AusAID



ABOVE: AusAID's Kathryn Bennett (*right*) helps out at a rice distribution ceremony in Yong Prim Village. Food is given to the village children as part of a food for education activity which means they are able to attend school rather than work in the fields all day. School enrolment in this village has increased by 55 per cent since May 2005 as a result of this support. Photo: AusAID



Author, host of 'Big Brother' and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Gretel Killeen writes in *Viewpoint* how education is a way out of the degrading misery of poverty see page 29.

PARTNERSHIPS AGAINST HIV/AIDS

Two powerful new partnerships will help Australia's efforts to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Australian Government and the William J. Clinton Foundation have joined forces, while the Government and the Lowy Institute for International Policy have also formed an alliance. The latter has led to the formation of an Australian business coalition on HIV/AIDS.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, and former President of the United States, Bill Clinton, signed a Memorandum of Understanding which will provide \$25 million from Australia over four years. This figure will be complemented by a similar amount from the Clinton Foundation.

Initially, the partnership will fund activities in three countries – Papua New Guinea, Vietnam and China. The Clinton

Foundation and AusAID will work together with public health authorities to scale-up treatment and care for people living with HIV/AIDS. This will include availability of antiretroviral drugs, improving laboratory and testing infrastructure, and strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems.

Mr Downer also officially launched the Asia-Pacific Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS. This initiative, which has evolved from a partnership between the Australian Government and the Lowy Institute for International Policy, recognises the long-term threat that HIV/AIDS poses for Australian business.

The United Nations estimates more than eight million people in the Asia-Pacific region are living with HIV and that this figure will reach 20 million by 2010 – unless action is taken. A joint United Nations–Asian Development Bank



study puts economic losses from HIV/AIDS in the Asia Pacific in 2001 at about \$10 billion and projects annual financial losses of up to \$24 billion by 2010.

The Government's partnership with the Clinton Foundation, as well as its efforts to enlist the expertise of Australia's corporate sector, has resulted in a major

acceleration of the Australian response to the spread of HIV in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, with President Clinton at the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, Sydney. Photo: Getty Images

TECHNICAL COLLEGE FOR PACIFIC

At the Pacific Islands Forum in late 2005, the Prime Minister, John Howard, announced in-principle support for the establishment of an Australian technical college for the Pacific. A major study is underway to take forward the Prime Minister's proposal.

The college concept is aimed at achieving two goals. The first is to increase the number of skilled Pacific island graduates. The second is to raise the quality of training to match Australian

standards in vocational and technical education.

The college may have a network of campuses in various Pacific nations with its headquarters in one of the most populated. If the idea comes off and quality training is taken up in the right sectors, Pacific island economies stand to gain. A larger, better skilled workforce will contribute to economic growth. Further, graduates will benefit from improved employment opportunities not only at home

– they'll also be able to compete in an increasingly international labour market.

The first phase of the study will be finalised shortly. It will provide recommendations on preferred locations for the college, the various sorts of training which should be offered, and how the college may best operate. A subsequent detailed design of the college is expected to be completed before the next Pacific Islands Forum meeting in late 2006.

ABOUT FOCUS

Focus magazine is published three times a year. Each issue takes a different theme and this issue (May to August 2006: vol 21 no 2) looks at the White Paper on aid with special reference to education and vocational and technical skills training. The theme for the next issue (September to December 2006: vol 21 no 3) is 'rural communities'.

Focus distribution is 50,000 copies. It is also available on-line at www.aisaid.gov.au/publications/focus