

## Submission on Australia's new International Gender Equality Strategy

### The Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development

The Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (APGPD) was founded in 1995 as a cross-party group of Members of Parliament and Senators committed to advocating for universal sexual and reproductive health services, the rights of women, and sustainable development.

#### Comments

Australia has made many commitments to advance gender equality in international forums, most notably as a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals where SDG 5 articulates gender equality as being a fundamental human right. Although there have been many gains made over the years to improve gender equality, as a global community we are not currently on track to achieve SDG 5 by 2030. There remains much that needs to be done to improve funding and access of women's health services, in addition to advancing laws, policies, budgets and institutions which protect the rights of women and promote gender equality.

Given the aims of the APGPD, which includes engaging members of parliament to support and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) through Australia's foreign policy engagement and international development strategy, we wish to stress the critical role of SRHR in enabling gender equality and building more peaceful, just and prosperous societies. Furthermore, our experience with bilateral partnerships through national parliaments is that promoting women's leadership is a vital strategy in advancing gender equality.

The APGPD is strongly supportive of a new International Gender Equality Strategy, building on the goals of the previous Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy (2016). We note in the last strategy there was little reference to SRHR; going forward, we believe universal access to healthcare and SRHR should be clearly articulated as being fundamental to advancing gender equality. Furthermore, the 2016 strategy emphasised women's economic empowerment, and we wish to note that protecting the SRHR of *all* people could also be framed as contributing to significant economic gains for individuals, communities and nations.

Over the past year, the APGPD has held discussions with numerous international organisations including International Planned Parenthood Federation, MSI Reproductive Choices and UNFPA. These discussions on issues including the neglected crisis of unintended pregnancy and the erosion of SRHR globally, has served to highlight the critical importance of Australian

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leadership. Our role needs to be strongly on focused promoting and protecting the bodily autonomy of women and girls, as well as promoting gender equality through Australia's foreign policy engagement, particularly in the face of organised and well-funded opposition to the rights of women and girls across the world.

As we noted in our submission to the new International Development policy, Australia is ranked 21 out of 29 OECD DAC countries in terms of aid spending given the proportion of our gross national income (GNI) devoted to ODA is around 0.20%, which is well below the 0.32% country average among OECD countries. Furthermore, it has been noted that Australia as a donor is also below average among OECD countries with funding international projects which aim to advance gender equality as well as funding women's right organisations overseas.<sup>i</sup> In 2020, Australia disbursed just USD 16.7 million to women's rights organisations, compared with the total USD 2.3 billion recorded in OECD disbursements that year.<sup>ii</sup>

At the Nairobi Summit in 2019, Australia reiterated its commitment to the International Conference on Population and Development's Programme of Action and 2030 Agenda, stating that "Australia remains fully committed to delivering on the ICPD and its Programme of Action both nationally and through our support for global action. We will continue to provide strong support to UNFPA and other key organisations delivering sexual and reproductive health services and rights. We remain focused on supporting improved sexual and reproductive health and rights outcomes in Pacific island states, and in humanitarian settings."<sup>iii</sup> It is imperative this commitment is considered in the development of a new International Gender Equality Strategy.

As the APGPD is a group primarily composed of female parliamentarians, we wish to draw attention to the value of political leadership and specifically the importance of promoting more women in parliament as being a goal of the new Strategy, particularly in countries which Australia has a bilateral relationship with. Past and present co-chairs and members of the APGPD have participated in numerous mentoring programs, notably the Myanmar Women Parliamentarians Mentoring Program<sup>iv</sup> as well as a similar one focused on Timor-Leste.<sup>v</sup> Women's participation in decision-making and leadership is important as a right in itself, and the wealth of experience they bring to leadership roles can lead to an increased focus on local level and international policies which strongly support gender equality.

## **Conclusion**

Universal SRHR needs to be embedded in Australia's new International Gender Equality Strategy, given the critical importance of SRHR to the empowerment of women and girls, which is central to driving successful and sustainable development. The previous commitments made by the Australian Government to adopt the ICPD Programme of Action and Sustainable

Development Goals need to be met. In addition, we must fulfill the commitments made at the Nairobi Summit in 2019. Australia needs to increase our ODA and value women's political leadership and presence in parliaments across the world.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the new International Gender Equality Strategy. We look forward to seeing how it evolves and would appreciate being kept informed over coming months.

Please do not hesitate to contact the co-chairs of the APGPD in relation to this submission.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/A-feminist-approach-to-Australian-Overseas-Development-Assistance.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup>

<https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/#?x=1&y=6&f=2:262,4:1,7:1,9:85,3:301,5:3,8:85&q=2:262+4:1+7:1+9:85+3:51,301,319+5:3+8:85+1:2,3,4,5,6,58,7,8,9,10,11,59,60,12,13,14,61,15,16,17,18,62,19,63,75,20,21,22,23,24,36+6:2016,2017,2018,2019,2020,2021>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.nairobisummitcpd.org/commitments>

<sup>iv</sup> [https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/IWDA\\_Learning-Brief-Myanmar-English.pdf](https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/IWDA_Learning-Brief-Myanmar-English.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> [https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/Learning-Brief-Timor-Leste\\_IWDA.pdf](https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/Learning-Brief-Timor-Leste_IWDA.pdf)