



**Statement Of Ian Howie
Representative To Vietnam
The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
Launch Of The *State Of World Population 2005* Report
Parliament House, Canberra
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Good afternoon.

As you have been told my name is Ian Howie and I am currently the UNFPA representative to Vietnam. I have had the pleasure of meeting with many of you in the past and on behalf of the fund would like to welcome you again to this year's SWOP launch. We have, in fact, been publishing this report annually for sixteen years.

For those of you joining us for the first time we applaud the demonstration of your commitment to a global area of great concern: a concern that is of equal importance to rich or poor, developed or developing. I refer to the subject of this report: gender equity. Or to give it its correct title ***the promise of equality: gender equity, reproductive health and the millennium development goals.***

The report's release at this time is particularly pertinent because it comes one month after the 2005 world summit in New York. There, world leaders pledged to reduce extreme poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Interestingly, the call for equal rights for women and men on this occasion was the same message that was enshrined in the united nations charter exactly sixty years ago.

But I am here today to say that world leaders will not make poverty history until they make gender discrimination history. Indeed, we cannot make poverty history until women enjoy their full social, cultural, economic and political rights. Nor can we make poverty history until we stop violence against women and girls. Those are the messages of this year's SWOP report.

Chapters in this year's report of which copies are available, track progress, expose shortfalls and examine links between poverty, gender equality, human rights, reproductive health and conflict and violence against women and girls.

It examines the relationship between gender discrimination and the scourge of HIV/AIDS. It identifies the vulnerabilities and strengths of history's largest cohort of young people and highlights the critical role they play in development.

The findings, simply stated, are these:

Women and young people represent a huge share of the world's population and are key to reducing poverty. They are at the very heart of development. When women are educated, healthy, employed and able to make decisions about childbearing and reproductive life, everyone benefits.

By such means the promotion of equality is not only an end in itself, but a powerful force for lifting individuals, families, communities and nations out of poverty.

Put another way, reducing inequality is necessary for greater economic efficiency and prosperity.

Where inequality does continue the costs are enormous. They include maternal deaths and disability, the acceleration of HIV infections (since women lack the power to negotiate their personal safety), and violence against women and girls in a silent epidemic of alarming proportions.

The global scorecard on each of these findings bears witness to the realities of widespread gender inequalities. Consider the following:

Economic opportunities

Today, the global population stands at almost 6.5 billion and is expected to reach 9.1 billion in 2050. The World Bank estimates that the total number of people living on less than \$1 a day is 1.1 billion. This number actually represents a fall in the last decade but progress for women has been painfully slow and the economic contributions they make have been largely ignored. According to the Bank, in developing countries women earn 73 cents for every dollar men earn, and in developed countries, 77 cents

Moreover, women's access to employment is lower than men's.

Women are less likely than men to hold paid and regular jobs and more often work in the informal sector, which provides little financial security. In addition to managing households, they toil in sweatshops, farms, factories, marketplaces, mines and offices and do so largely in the absence of supportive policies, laws, institutions and services. In many countries they still risk dismissal should they become pregnant!

Not surprisingly, women represent 60% of the world's 550 million working poor.

Clearly, unless efforts are made to create decent work for the global informal workforce, the world will not be able to eliminate poverty or achieve gender equality.

Education

Educating girls, especially at secondary or higher levels, offers high payoffs in terms of poverty reduction. It also impacts on the educational and health status of the next generation, on HIV prevention, on infant and maternal health, on income-earning prospects, on reduced fertility and on the elimination of harmful practices.

Every year of a mother's education corresponds with a 5-10 per cent drop in infant mortality rates.

Every three years of additional education correlates with up to one less child per woman.

But almost two-thirds of the world's 800 million illiterate adults are women. Only 69 per cent of girls in southern Asia complete primary school and less than 50 per cent are enrolled in secondary school. For sub-Saharan Africa the figures are 49 per cent and 30 per cent.

Reproductive health

Reproductive health is also a matter of equity and human rights but no other area of health reflects such glaring disparities and inequities between rich and poor, both within and among countries.

It is problems associated with reproductive health that are the leading cause of death and illness among women between 15 and 44.

Globally, half a million women die each year in pregnancy-related complications.

In sub-Saharan Africa pregnancy is a 1 in 16 lifetime risk. In industrialised nations, the risk is 1 in 2,800.

Unsafe abortions, unwanted pregnancies and lack of access to effective contraceptives are issues that rarely cross our television screens yet they are a daily reality for the bulk of the world's women.

HIV/AIDS

Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of HIV and aids and here I want to include all sexually transmitted diseases.

While the HIV epidemic initially affected mostly men, today the face of aids is increasingly female, and increasingly young. 6,000 are infected every day.

Particularly to be noticed is that almost half of the 40 million people living with HIV are women. And contrary to the common belief that married women are “safe”, many have been infected by their husbands.

Gender based violence

Violence against women and girls is a silent global epidemic of alarming proportions. The Report informs us that: 1 in 3 women is beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused, usually by a family member or an acquaintance; that gender based violence affects as many women and girls 15-44 as cancer; and that nearly 50 per cent of sexual assaults involve girls 15 years and under.

Parliamentary representation

Finally, let me say something of women’s share of seats in parliament. While their share has inched up in all regions, women still hold only 16 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide.

All these “realities” I have highlighted: lack of economic opportunities, education and reproductive health and victims of HIV/AIDS and domestic violence; are largely preventable.

The solution lies in empowering women and improving access to reproductive health care and in ways that wealthier people and countries take for granted. For just \$10 you can provide a developing country with

567 male condoms

17 female condoms

5 couples protected by condoms for one year

25 IUDs providing 25 couples with protection against unintended pregnancy

3 women enabled to space their children using injectable contraception

6 pregnancy safe delivery kits

3 women provided with quality antenatal care

200 persons tested for syphilis and

33 persons treated for gonorrhoea or syphilis.

Yet even when AIDS kills three million a year and devastates countries like nothing since the black death, annual world spending against aids equals three days of military expenditures.

Even to save 4,000 lives a day, mostly of women, lost because of unsafe drinking water would cost less annually than Europeans spend on perfume or Americans spend on cosmetic surgery!

So, what is to be done?

As representative of the people, you, the parliamentarians, hold enormous influence in the way Australian development policies are made, including the all-important issue of the allocation of resources. I hope you invest such capital in ensuring that reproductive health is reflected in AusAID's development strategies. Certainly, that is what the Australian government has agreed to. By signing up to the outcome of the just concluded world summit you made a commitment to and I quote:

“achieving universal access to reproductive health by 2015, integrating this goal in strategies to attain the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the millennium declaration, (which are) aimed at reducing maternal mortality, improving maternal health, reducing child mortality, promoting gender equality, combating HIV/AIDS and eradicating poverty”. (World Summit Outcome paragraph 57 [g]).

By increasing its contribution to UNFPA this year the Australian government has made an important move in this direction.

For its part, UNFPA is at the cutting edge of tackling issues related to population and development. Underpinning all our programmes is the striving to give people, particularly women, choices.

The equality of choices is an end in itself and a cornerstone of our development efforts. Take for example the work we are doing in Vietnam.

Despite great success nationally maternal mortality in the central highlands of Vietnam is well above the average. It stands at 300 even 400 per 100,000 live births. In Australia it is 12.9 per 100,000. UNFPA is working with the ministry of health to train village based health workers to provide emergency obstetric care. There is no other aid agency doing this. Without our support highlands women would die. Being poor and remote they have few options. We are trying to broaden their choices.

To conclude.

Investing in gender equality has short and long-term social and economic multiplier effects. Not only is it economically inefficient not to do so but the costs to unleash the power of half of humanity are moderate, in relation to the benefits they offer.

More to the point inequalities between men and women are a violation of human rights and something we should not tolerate.

So, if the strategies and know-how are available all we need now is for the leadership and the resources to be mobilised.

Are you up to the task?

Thank you.