



## **Launch of the 2005 State of the World Population Report, 12 October 2005**

*Senator Marise Payne, Hon Secretary, Parliamentary Group on Population and  
Development*

Welcome Dame Carol, Mr Ian Howie, Christina Richards – Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance, Your Excellencies, my parliamentary colleagues, and special guests.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen for joining me today for the launch of the UNFPA State of World Population report.

It gives me great pleasure to be here for the launch of this report, subtitled 'The Promise of Equality – Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals' to lend my very public support to the simple aspiration of global equality between the sexes.

In this report, we see the continued commitment necessary to drive implementation of the Millennium Development Goals to relieve international poverty.

The MDGs address the root causes of extreme poverty, especially gender inequalities

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are internationally recognised goals and targets aimed at halving global poverty by 2015. They deal with issues such as universal primary education, halting the spread of HIV and improving maternal health.

The MDGs propose that gender equality is critical to development. It not only enhances the lives and livelihoods of one half of the world's population, but is necessary for the well-being, health and economic prosperity of all.

Reproductive health has been incorporated into the MDGs, and is considered essential to the elimination of poverty

Indeed, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has said that “the MDGs, particularly [those related to] the eradication of poverty and hunger, cannot be achieved if questions of population and reproductive health are not squarely addressed... And that means stronger efforts to promote women’s rights and greater investment in education and health, including reproductive health”.

The World Summit also recognised that the achievement of universal access to reproductive health by 2015 was essential to combat the most extreme forms of poverty. Good reproductive health is a human right, and all individuals should have that right free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

The 1989 Amsterdam Conference and the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development indicated the clear need for a consistent level of funding for population and health programs.

It was agreed that developed nations provide at least four percent of all overseas aid towards population and health programs; a figure that Australia still strives to meet.

By definition, family planning programs serve those who are sexually active. To this end, they provide a significant service for men and women in health and well-being and in ensuring the development of happy and healthy families and communities.

There is a high degree of overlap between the population at risk of unintended, unsafe pregnancies and those at risk of HIV/AIDS. Women and girls at high risk of unintended pregnancy and maternal death are often the same women and girls who are at high risk for HIV infection.

Half of all new infections occur among young people ages 15 to 24, and responding to the unmet demand for family planning among young adults provides us with an opportunity to engage with them in the hope of mitigating unsafe sex. Family planning programs create an opportunity for counselling sexually active people about a whole range of sexual risks, including those for unintended pregnancy and exposure to HIV.

Yet, family planning must only play a part in overall reproductive health strategies.

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) agreed on a 20 year Program of Action (PoA). 179 countries, including Australia, agreed to the PoA.

The Program of Action explicitly states that: reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. It implies that people have the capacity to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this is the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility, which are not against the law, and the right of access to health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth.

It also states that abortion is not a method of family planning. Prevention of unwanted pregnancies must always be given the highest priority and every attempt should be made to eliminate the need for abortion.

In part, the PoA states that:

"In no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning. All governments and relevant intergovernmental and non-government organisations are urged to strengthen their commitment to women's health, to deal with the health impact of unsafe abortion of as a major public health concern and to reduce the recourse to abortion through expanded and improved family planning services."

Every year, about 529,000 women die of pregnancy-related causes that are almost entirely preventable. Lack of access to modern contraceptives is the major factor behind an estimated 76 million unintended pregnancies in the developing world alone, and an estimated 19 million unsafe abortions worldwide each year. Many of these lead to permanent disabilities or death for women.

Investing in political, economic and educational opportunities for women and girls, on the other hand, yields quick wins and high pay-offs that lead to improved economic prospects, smaller families, healthier and more literate children, lower HIV prevalence rates and reduced incidence of harmful traditional practices.

Intimately associated with poverty is lack of access to family planning and reproductive health. Today, the world population stands at almost 6.5 billion and is expected to reach 9.1 billion in 2050. This projection is predicated on whether men and women will continue to have the means to decide when and how often to have children.

To this end, I welcome the launch of this report, which in some small way will continue to ensure government programs remain free from moralistic and ignorant arguments, and they remain focused on ensuring a better life for all those in need.