

Motion proposed by Kay Hull MP

See below

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)**—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

#### **Australian Aid Program**

**Mrs HULL** (Riverina) (1.18 pm)—I move:

That the House:

- (1) supports the Australian aid program's focus on eradication of poverty and corruption in developing countries;
- (2) supports the Australian aid program's efforts to overcome the impact of poverty and corruption and to strengthen democratic institutions by promotion of good governance with specific reference to women and children in developing countries;
- (3) calls on the Parliament to encourage the Australian aid program to promote the human rights of, and the elimination of discrimination against, women and children in developing countries, in activities that:
  - (a) support the elimination of gender-based discrimination—such as land, inheritance and property rights, family law, gender-based violence and discrimination in employment; and
  - (b) support equitable access (including legal representation) for women and children to the legal system.

Corruption is a major brake on our efforts to reform poverty reduction in many countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Corruption undermines aid effectiveness and particularly impacts on the most disadvantaged, including women. At the Millennium Summit in 2005, the Prime Minister committed to increasing the Australian aid program to around \$4 billion per annum by 2010. Increases in aid will be conditional on strengthened governance and reduced corruption in our partner countries, and I wholeheartedly support this approach. I am very pleased to have the member for Pearce second my motion today for she has a great commitment to and understanding of women's issues, and her leadership of the Australian delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the IPU, is powerful and determined, particularly in support of developing countries and gender equality.

Gender inequalities intensify poverty and perpetuate it from one generation to the next, preventing women and girls from taking up opportunities that could potentially make them and their families less vulnerable to poverty. Capacity enhancement for women in impoverished countries can begin with the simple initiative of access to microfinance. Women in villages and communities can grow and prosper by having the finances to purchase, for instance, a sewing machine. This simple act that we in developed countries take for granted can mean freedom from abuse for women and their children in many developing countries.

Violence against women and children is always an area of particular concern. A measure that is needed to support legislative change and more effective law and justice responses or support services for women and children is public advocacy by civil society organisations. In fact, women and children need easy access to legal prosecution options and avenues so that they can be protected. This, as I indicated, must be an easily accessible option for women and children in developing countries.

The white paper on Australia's overseas aid program has gender as an overarching principle. Australia's commitment requires that the views, needs, interests and rights of women and girls shape the development agenda as much as those of men and boys; that women and men participate in and benefit equally from aid programs; and that development supports progress towards equality between women and men and between boys and girls. Our Australian aid program is also taking steps to improve the economic status of women and to promote the equal participation of women in decision-making and leadership, including the promotion and protection of the human rights of women and girls in the law and justice sector service delivery. The Australian aid program is also taking steps to promote equitable health and education outcomes for women and children and to advance issues of gender equality in

regional cooperation efforts. I am very proud of the process that the Australian government has undertaken in the past few years with its aid programs.

The aid program established a human rights fund of \$2.5 million in 2006-2007, which supports the very issues I am interested in. These issues in particular are supported in the Human Rights Small Grants Scheme for mostly non-government organisation projects—for example, raising the profile of children's rights in Fiji. The small grant projects are a fantastic opportunity for women and children to get the support they require.

Human rights are also supported through bilateral, regional and non-government organisation programs. For example, Australia's assistance to Papua New Guinea's law and justice sector has improved access to justice and promoted the rights of women and children. Public prosecutors and investigators have been trained in sexual assault law, and the operation of village court systems has been improved through a major training program for court officials.

In closing, might I say that I am very proud of our process and our actions, and I urge the Australian government to proceed even further in ensuring those rights of access for women and children to the legal system. (*Time expired*)

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)**—Is the motion seconded?

**Mrs Moylan**—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

**Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (1.23 pm)**—I rise to speak in support of the private member's motion regarding Australian aid programs. This motion examines Australian aid programs and their impact on eradicating corruption in developing countries, overcoming poverty, strengthening democratic institutions and eliminating gender based discrimination.

Through years of neglect, Australia's development assistance has lost its focus on poverty reduction. An independent report by the OECD confirmed that Australia needs to place greater attention on reducing global poverty. Australia has been criticised for supplying 'boomerang aid', where large amounts of aid finds itself in the pockets of Australian consultants and not in the hands of locals for local services or for directly addressing the problem of poverty. More aid needs to reach the poor and disadvantaged groups within society that are struggling to survive.

Australia delivers one of the lowest levels of development assistance compared with other developed countries. Australia's development assistance should directly target the reduction of poverty. We believe that in order for us to seriously tackle poverty we must deliver development assistance at a grassroots level. It has been proved that development assistance at this level is the most effective at combating poverty. Our

country has the resources, expertise and generosity to design and implement projects targeted at the grassroots which will help eliminate poverty. According to the organisation Make Poverty History, extreme poverty kills 30,000 children every day. Poverty not only kills but also contributes to international insecurity. Extreme poverty has been linked to political and economic instability, human rights abuse, unrest and war, uncontrolled migration and population growth, and environmental degradation.

We as a nation have not done enough to provide development assistance to the world's least developed countries. The key objectives of the Australian Aid Program should be to work with developing countries to realise the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals should be used as the new framework Australia follows for global overseas development assistance. These goals have the ability to improve the relationship that developed and developing countries share and to improve the effectiveness of Australia's aid program. The goals provide a clear vision and framework for halving extreme poverty by 2015 and ending it altogether by 2025. Three of the Millennium Development Goals relate specifically to the issues raised by the member for Riverina. These goals include to promote gender equality and empower women, to reduce child mortality and to improve maternal health. Australia's overseas aid program should involve a cooperative partnership with developing countries. The aid program, within the context of the Millennium Development Goals, will do this.

We need to incorporate the poor in economic and social development and allow for the establishment of activities which enable women to contribute to and benefit from development. In order to promote these activities, we must support and improve the health and education of women. In addition to this, a human rights framework should characterise Australia's overseas aid program. Recipient countries should respect the human rights of their people, including those of their indigenous peoples. However, we should err on the side of caution in not imposing donor values and structures on developing countries through development assistance.

I welcome the fact that the government has responded to community pressure and announced that it will increase Australia's development assistance from the embarrassingly low levels to which it has fallen. However, Australia is still one of the few developed countries that to date has failed to produce an action plan for its Millennium Development Goals. Australians will benefit from a more secure world, which will be achieved only when fewer people face desperate circumstances and appalling living conditions every day.

Australians are a very generous people, as we saw in the moving response to the Asian tsunami from right

across the community. The generosity is also displayed by the support that Australians have given to the organisation Make Poverty History. The support that this organisation has gained from the Australian community demonstrates the willingness of the Australian population to assist in the global fight against poverty. It is time that Australia made a commitment to eliminating poverty before the end of our lifetimes. It is not enough for us to remain complacent. We need to support those in the global community who need help. Reducing global poverty should be an issue of national importance. On this side of the House we will continue to work to ensure that the government cares as much about the plight of people in extreme poverty as the Australian community does. (*Time expired*)

**Mrs MOYLAN** (Pearce) (1.29 pm)—Firstly I thank my colleague the member for Riverina for bringing before the House this motion on the Australian aid program. The member for Riverina was elected to the Asia-Pacific group of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians in the IPU, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in Kenya early last year. Those of us participating in that conference are very proud of the contribution the member for Riverina is making to the work of the IPU women's committee. The member for Riverina has made a very big impact in the IPU meetings. Some people say she is a pocket rocket—there is not much of her but she certainly has an impact—and that is true.

This motion fits well with the member for Riverina's interest in improving the participation of women in politics and her work to improve the quality of life for both women and girls. The motion supports the work of the Australian government to eradicate poverty and corruption and to strengthen democratic institutions by promoting good governance with specific reference to women and children in developing countries. I agree with my colleague the member for Hindmarsh that poverty is a huge issue that not only affects the quality of life for individuals but will also threaten regional security if it is not handled and eradicated.

It is difficult to believe that in the 21st century, when so much has been achieved in science, medicine, education and communications, women and children in developing countries are still denied basic human rights. Gender discrimination continues to thrive, denying women and children property rights, access to legal representation, employment and protection against violence and discrimination.

While recognising that much more needs to be done, the Australian government continues to provide support for improving governance within our region. The difficulty we have is that political instability and lack of security feed into the poverty cycle and put women and children at greater risk. Australia has contributed \$4 billion in aid—I think that is what the member for

Riverina said—and will contribute \$645 million in aid to women and children in the Asia-Pacific with a strong emphasis on anticorruption, leadership development, respect for women and the promotion of equal participation in public life. On top of that, Australia has been playing a very significant role in helping to restore law and order in the Solomons because, where law and order do not exist, women and children are particularly at risk, as I said, and it does feed into the poverty cycle.

Australia is also playing a very significant role, along with our Portuguese colleagues—and the member for Riverina and I recently had the opportunity along with other members of the IPU delegation to visit the Portuguese parliament and to talk to our Portuguese colleagues—in continuing to work in East Timor to build institutions that will give East Timor stability and to provide opportunities for women to establish microbusinesses to employ young people. We know that providing microcredit to women has very positive outcomes. World Bank research shows that women make an effective contribution to government in postconflict situations. Women's influence leads efforts to fight corruption and to establish accountability processes at both a national and local level. Where women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster and poverty reduction is more rapid. It makes sense for developing countries to use the talents and abilities of the other half of their population which so often goes underutilised.

The government supports the Regional Rights Resource Team, which works in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Kiribati, and also supports legal rights training officers based in Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and the Cook Islands. This support involves training, technical support, policy and advocacy advice in human rights, social justice and good governance in the Pacific region. It encourages leaders to embrace good governance principles—including the ratification and implementation of human rights conventions and exploring the relationship between customary law and human rights—and combat corruption.

Australia makes a significant contribution throughout the world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, and Australian members of parliament can play a significant role in encouraging more women in the region to take on positions of leadership. (*Time expired*)

**Mr McMULLAN** (Fraser) (1.34 pm)—I congratulate the member for Riverina for her initiative in putting the matter of the Australian aid program on the agenda. I know her interest and commitment in this area. We have done a few things together around countries in our region. Following the recent tsunami, millions of Australians think global poverty and inequality are important enough to put up their own money every fortnight, every month and every year. The Make Pov-

erty History campaign and the Millennium Development Goals show that young Australians in particular are very committed in this area. If we in this parliament and all governments can convince Australians that their aid dollar will work then they can be encouraged to support increased government efforts to tackle the problem of poverty, and that is a matter to which we need to address ourselves.

With more than 800 million people living in poverty, two-thirds of them in our region, the reduction of poverty should be the one true focus of the Australian aid program. The reduction of poverty benefits Australia's national interest by creating a more secure world in which fewer people face desperate circumstances and appalling living conditions every day.

As the shadow minister responsible for international development assistance, I want to use this opportunity to call for a restoration of balance between the focus on poverty reduction—basic services like health and education, employment, assistance with governance and capacity building—and the focus on corruption. All those things need to be part of a package, but I think Australia as a nation has had the balance wrong in recent times and we need to tilt it back towards poverty reduction, basic services and employment.

It is very appropriate that we are discussing this today because ASPI, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, has today put out a paper, by Roland Rich, which has a number of important things to say about this subject. I want to mention just two things in the time available. In his talk about capacity building, Roland Rich has raised what I think is a very important point: we need to do more about training the Australians we send overseas to assist. Many of the people who go out to do this job—many of them are my constituents because they are often Commonwealth public servants—find that people are well motivated and sometimes achieve excellent results. But, as a strategic policy objective, we have to fund more training for those people so that, to make sure we have enhanced quality assurance of the training that is provided, we are maximising the benefit of the hours, commitment and dollars that we are providing.

Roland Rich has also raised an important point about enhancing the role of the private sector in Australia in enhancing enterprise development in developing countries. His paper takes an innovative look at the way in which we can generate more employment opportunities and economic growth in developing countries and it warrants more research. I cannot say at the moment that I endorse everything he says, but he is making a very important case and it deserves to be looked at.

I welcome the member for Riverina's focus on the enhanced role of women and the relevant Millennium Development Goals on which our aid projects need to

focus. All the evidence shows that investment in women's health and education is the best form of effective investment in economic development—and in national and social development. Most of the money in microcredit goes to women for two very simple reasons: they are best at paying it back and they make best use of it for economic development and to assist their families. Finance providers give microcredit to women not because of issues of gender equity; they say that recognising gender equity means that you give more money to women because it works better and they pay it back more. For those reasons I think that that element of the focus and the whole question that the UNFPA has been talking about—dealing with gender equity and overcoming gender discrimination—is fundamental. We squander the fundamental investment in human capital if we do not get rid of gender discrimination.

I welcome the improvements in the aid program in the recent white paper and the Prime Minister's commitments. We have had 10 wasted years, but we do have an improvement now. I urge an enhanced policy focus on the Millennium Development Goals. If the government gets the focus right, Australians of good heart will support them.

**Mrs ELSON** (Forde) (1.39 pm)—I am very pleased to support the motion by the member for Riverina and to be part of a government that is actively working to ensure our overseas aid program does focus on the things that really matter. The simple fact is that, unless we continue to demand more of the governments in the countries whose citizens we are seeking to help, we cannot expect long-term solutions to their problems. What is more, I firmly believe we have a right to demand more and to speak out against practices that we know are wrong.

There are some in this House who think that aid and assistance should be unconditional—that the purpose of helping is simply to feed the hungry and to provide housing and the other basics that their governments have failed to deliver—and that we should not be involved in the politics of any particular nations. There are people who feel we have no right to impose on another culture our values, our beliefs, our legal system and our sense of fairness. To a point, that argument has some merit, but, when cultural sensitivity is used as an excuse to turn a blind eye to blatant injustice, it is just not on. It is also common sense that, by promoting good governance and working to eliminate injustice and corruption, we can vastly improve the situation of many impoverished nations.

It is a sad fact that gender based discrimination is one of the injustices that we see occurring in many impoverished nations. For example, I saw on the news just this weekend that the UN has released a report that finds the number of so-called honour killings of

women in Pakistan has more than doubled in the past year. This is surely evidence of the need for all nations to put more pressure on the Pakistani government to ensure equal rights for women and, in particular, equal access to the justice system.

Unfortunately, some of these barbaric practices against women—honour killing being an example—are culturally based. I believe that in the modern world there can be no place for this kind of culture. Adherence to these primitive and barbaric rituals should not be tolerated by any person or any nation. Of course, honour killings are an extreme example of discrimination, but many other forms of gender inequality are often entrenched in the laws, policies and systems of developing countries.

In the developing nations to which we give aid, men, women and children all suffer, but, in many instances, women and children are much worse off than men are. When I travelled to Africa as part of a parliamentary delegation to examine our overseas aid programs in Mozambique and Kenya, I saw firsthand the benefits of Australian aid, particularly for the women and children in those countries. Until you witness firsthand the massive difference that the Australian government is making to the lives of women and children, you cannot really judge whether we give enough money or not. Australia gave \$42,000 to put bores in remote communities. I opened a bore where previously the women and children had to go down to the river to get water—the men did not get the water because of the danger of being eaten by crocodiles. That was \$42,000 well spent by the Australian government.

In those countries, our aid has a very strong education focus—education being the key to eradicating poverty and also, hopefully, to addressing injustice and gender discrimination. We have a successful ‘school for food’ program, in which we encourage young children to access education, and a tremendous ‘work for food’ program, which helps women to develop work projects that can sustain them in the future. I saw firsthand a project which, for the first time in the women’s lives, gave them control of the money coming into their family and gave their children a better chance at life.

Giving women access to some degree of economic freedom is the first step in giving them access to a greater level of participation in communities and in politics. It is very interesting to note that, by helping women to have equal rights, status and participation in the political process, we can also reduce corruption and poverty overall. Research by the World Bank has found that, where the influence of women in public life is greater, the overall level of corruption is lower. When women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster and the poor move out of poverty much quicker.

As I said at the outset, by addressing gender inequality we can do much to address the overall problems faced by developing countries. I am very pleased to support this motion today, to note the contribution of the Australian aid program and to thank all of those people who work overseas to deliver our programs.

**Ms PLIBERSEK** (Sydney) (1.43 pm)—I would like to associate myself with, in particular, part 3 of the motion, which supports the elimination of gender based discrimination, particularly against young girls. We all know it is not just the quantity of aid we give that matters but also the quality of aid. Australia can certainly play a role in eliminating discrimination against women and girls in developing countries. Previous speakers have mentioned microcredit. Microcredit is a very important way of improving the status of women in developing nations. Another very important focus is the education of girls. Two-thirds of the world’s illiterate population are female. Without improving that figure we will never really tackle the economic exclusion of women. But it is not just about their economic exclusion; it is also about the health effects. We know that, where mothers are literate, not just their own health is vastly better but also the health of their children. Australia has a very generous population. We are personally very generous but we could do a lot more to—

**The SPEAKER**—Order! It being 1.45 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 34. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed on a future day.

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

### Airport Security

**Mr MURPHY** (Lowe) (1.45 pm)—On 9 August 2006 the Minister for Justice and Customs answered my question No. 3391 in relation to tampering with CCTV cameras in the baggage area of Sydney airport controlled by Customs. That answer confirmed that on 23 October 2004 a camera was found to have no focus. On 26 January 2005 a second camera was found to be facing the wall. On 30 January the original camera, camera No. 1, was also found to be facing the wall. Mr Speaker, I asked a whole series of questions of the minister about that on 9 and 10 August last year, and last week I asked you in the parliament, under standing order 105(b), to follow these questions up to get answers. It is not good enough for the minister to say that, while on three occasions in a very highly sensitive area these cameras were out of focus or pointing to a wall, nevertheless, because of the overlap factor, the other fields of view were picked up by cameras that were operating properly. People need to know why these cameras were interfered with in one of the most highly sensitive areas. The government prides itself on