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The penny has dropped — at least in the UK

The pledge by the United Kingdom* to provide £100 million - nearly AU\$230 million - over five years to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to help achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015 is an example all developed nations should try to emulate, the CEO of the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance, Jane Singleton, said today.

Speaking from London, where she is attending the Women Deliver conference at which the UK announcement was made, Ms Singleton said an estimated 200 million of the world's women currently lack access to the contraception they need.

"Australian women take for granted the right and the means to control their own fertility, but in many developing nations, including our close neighbours, women are still powerless over the number and spacing of their children. For them, pregnancy can mean their own death and/or the death of their infant," she said.

"One woman is dying every minute in pregnancy or childbirth.

"In Australia 8 women die in every 100,000 births. In Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, East Timor and Afghanistan that figure is 230, 300, 500, 660 and 1900 respectively. This is a situation we should no longer tolerate. The UNFPA's goal of universal access to reproductive health by 2015 is a goal Australian political leaders should commit to, today.

"It is gratifying that at least in the UK, the penny has dropped - the UK has clearly recognised that family planning can provide enormous benefits to large numbers of people at relatively low cost.

"Without the kind of commitment that the UK is now showing, it will be impossible to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of halving world poverty by 2015."

Ms Singleton said the UK would be providing AU\$46 million a year to UNFPA, compared with Australia's current allocation of \$4.5 million a year. When the larger population of the UK was taken into account, the per capita allocation for the UK would be 78 cents, compared with Australia's current allocation of 21 cents.

"We urge Australian political leaders to at least triple our allocation from this year's \$4.5 million to \$13.5 million in the next Budget."

ARHA was established in 1995, following the United Nations' International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, Cairo, September 1994). Its mission is to gain greater public support for enhanced sexual and reproductive health in Australia and internationally, and to promote the advancement of the status of women and girls.

**The UNFPA announcement is available at <http://www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=1048>*

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