

EDUCATE GIRLS AND SAVE LIVES

When girls are educated, they are more likely to have fewer and healthier children and to enjoy safer childbirth, according to the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA).

July 11 is World Population Day, commemorating the day in 1987 when the world's population passed five billion. This year's theme is 'Fight Poverty: Educate Girls.'

ARHA's Chief Executive Officer, Ms Jane Singleton, says that, on this World Population Day, we must not forget that every year 530,000 women die in pregnancy and childbirth.

"If educating girls leads ultimately to safer childbirth, then we should educate girls as a top priority although there are, of course, a host of other benefits".

Ms Singleton says it is important to remember two Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in particular.

"MDG 2 is to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. And MDG 3 is to promote gender equality and to empower women.

"Put those together and women will be able to become highly productive members of society beyond their traditional roles of caring for family. With an education, they will get better jobs within the paid workforce."

Ms Singleton says that an educated woman is in a better position to participate fully in society, including holding elected office.

"Yet in many neighbouring countries in the Pacific, there are hardly any women elected to national government. Dame Carol Kidu, for instance, is the only woman in the Papua New Guinea Parliament. There are no female parliamentarians at all in American Samoa, Micronesia, Nauru, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. Indeed, apart from the French territories, women occupy a mere 4 per cent of seats in Pacific Parliaments".

Ms Singleton applauded the recent reintroduction of a motion by the Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, to address the current lack of participation and representation by women in the Papua New Guinea Parliament. If passed, the motion will allow for the appointment of three women into Parliament.

"This will be a step towards women's voices being heard at the national level and their contributions to society being recognised and respected."

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ARHA's mission is to promote public support for enhanced reproductive and sexual health in Australia and internationally, and to promote the advancement of the status of women and girls.