

Media Release: For immediate release

Human Rights Day: Women's Rights are Human Rights

Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that the rights and freedoms it defines apply to all people, regardless of gender, many women in the world do not have access to the full range of their human rights.

Following Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms the right to health and medical care, the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) believes that access to sexual and reproductive health services is a basic human right. Sexual and reproductive health is a crucial element in allowing women to fully exercise a wide range of other human rights, including the right to security, education and employment.

The theme for Human Rights Day 2010 is '*human rights defenders who act to end discrimination*,' recognising and celebrating all those that work to defend human rights, often at great risk and cost to themselves and their families. The day is further intended to inspire more people to take a stand against discrimination, and governments will also be reminded of the role that they must play in protecting and supporting human rights defenders.

Human Rights Day also marks the final day of the Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender Violence. ARHA CEO, Mary Mertin-Ryan emphasizes that "violence against women is a direct contravention of their human rights with severe impacts on women's and children's health and wellbeing as well as an extraordinary social cost. We know that societies are richer, more productive and stable when women are able to access the full range of their rights and participate as equals, free from violence and discrimination."

Ms. Mary Mertin-Ryan, emphasizes that it is vital to take steps to end violence against women, both in Australia, where 1 in 3 women experience physical or sexual abuse in their lives, and in our region more broadly.

"All women have the right to live, work, and make safe and informed decisions about their reproductive health in an environment free from violence. Although much progress has been made since 1948, there is still an unacceptable divide between the freedoms set out in Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the rights that women around the world actually enjoy."

On behalf of the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance, Ms. Mertin Ryan, would also like to congratulate one such defender of human rights: women's advocate Marie Coleman, who was recently named ACT Senior Australian of the Year 2011.

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