

Embargoed to 15 September 2004

AUSTRALIA FALLS SHORT IN MEETING ITS GLOBAL COMMITMENTS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND POVERTY REDUCTION

The annual *State of World Population Report* released by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) will be officially launched in Melbourne on Wednesday 15th September. The report examines progress made, and obstacles encountered, at the half way mark of the 20 year Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, 1994.

The 2004 report discusses the implications of declining levels of overseas aid funding directed toward population and reproductive health programs. Shortfalls in funding pledged by donors continue to undermine the progress of the ICPD Programme of Action; Australia is among a list of western nations who have failed to reach their financial commitments. Meanwhile, complications of pregnancy and childbirth remain the leading cause of death of women.

Non-government organisations will meet in Melbourne today for a one-day symposium at which the State of World Population Report will be launched.

Today Christina Richards, CEO of the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance stated: "We call on the Australian Government to fulfil the promises it made in Cairo. Since 1994 the Australian Government has dramatically cut funding for the United Nations Population Fund and the International Planned Parenthood Federation,

both key agencies in the implementation of the Programme of Action".

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Ms Richards said: "Funding for family planning programs within the Australian aid program was AUD \$7 million following the 1994 conference, ten years on it sits just above AUD \$2 million; such a cut in funding is difficult to comprehend when some of our neighbouring countries - such as East Timor and Papua New Guinea - have the highest fertility and maternal mortality rates in the world".

Some of the report's sobering statistics include:

- Pregnancy is the leading cause of death for young women between 15-19 worldwide;
- Nearly 70 000 women die every year as a result of unsafe abortion;
- 201 million women have an unmet need for contraception;
- Population growth, along with high consumption in high-income countries, causes increasing stress on the environment.

The report finds that responses to these challenges by donor countries have been inadequate. Donor countries are only providing \$3.1 billion a year, half of the \$6.1 billion a year promised by 2005 to implement the Programme of Action.

Event:	Launch of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2004 State of World Population Report <i>"The Cairo Consensus at Ten: Population, Reproductive Health and the Global Effort to End Poverty"</i> . The official Australian launch of the Report will be held at 12:40pm
Venue:	The Y Hotel Conference Centre, 489 Elizabeth St, Melbourne
Media Contacts:	Jennifer Power, Australian Reproductive Health Alliance Ph: 02 6287 4422 mob: 0416 012 909 email: arha@arha.org.au

“We have known for a long time that meeting people’s family planning and reproductive health needs is critical to achieving poverty reduction in the world’s poorest and most populous regions; to

ignore this link is a serious oversight on the part of our Government” Ms Richards said today.

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