



AUSTRALIA



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UN General Assembly, Agenda Item 13 (b) – Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference for Population and Development

Australian National Statement

**The Hon Dr Sharman Stone
Member of Parliament of Australia**

(Check against delivery)

Thank-you Mr President.

The issues covered by the Follow Up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development are central to global efforts to achieve a peaceful, stable and prosperous world, and are at the core of our human experience.

Mr President, while there has been some good progress in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action, it is an outrage that on the 20th anniversary of ICPD we are still struggling to ensure fundamental human rights for women and girls; to protect women and girls from discrimination and violence in all its forms, and to prevent early marriage and early pregnancy.

Not only must we ensure these rights and protections, but we must address the reality that women and children are also bearing the brunt of increasingly violent conflict and protracted humanitarian crises around the world.

Women and children are receiving barbaric treatment at the hands of ISIL, who are systematically targeting women and children with rape and other forms of sexual and physical violence. Unmarried Iraqi girls and women have been forcibly transported to Syria either to be gifted to ISIL fighters, or sold as sex slaves and there are reports that an 'office' for sale of abducted women has opened in Mosul city.¹

It is 178 days² since 273 girls were kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria;

And we are seeing increasing rates of early and forced marriage as a response to displacement and insecurity, with reports that rates of child marriage have increased alarmingly in some Syrian refugee populations.³

We cannot collectively, tolerate these actions, which are not only abominable acts, but also fundamentally undermine basic global norms and the rights women and girls which continue to be challenged and questioned in far too many situations around the world.

This is intolerable in the 21st Century.

Given these alarming trends, the ICPD Programme of Action is as important today as it was twenty years ago. We must work together to advance the rights of women and girls, and not allow these rights to be eroded – this will take commitment and action.

¹ OHCHR UNAMI Report October 2014
http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC_Report_FINAL_6July_10September2014.pdf#sthash.Oe1yfIQo.dpuf

² On 9 October 2014

³ Save the Children 2014 *Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage Among Syrian Girls in Jordan*

Mr President,

Australia commits to protect and promote the rights of women and girls in all settings, including humanitarian and conflict situations. Women and children make up the vast majority⁴ of internally displaced and refugee populations. The loss of their homes, communities and social safety nets renders these women and children extraordinarily vulnerable. We will not let conflict or disasters become an excuse to weaken our resolve to empower and protect these women and children.

In this spirit, Australia is providing a further \$2 million to the United Nations Population Fund to continue its work to protect women and girls in Iraq. We must not forget that women and children in perilous circumstances still have rights, and that those rights need to be protected.

Mr President,

Australia confirms its commitment to the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, to the Beijing Platform for Action, and their subsequent reviews.

And Australia is committed to ensure that gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights are firmly embedded in the post-2015 development agenda.

At the Asian and Pacific Population Conference in Bangkok, held in September last year, Australia – and the majority of countries in our region – supported a forward-looking declaration that upholds sexual and reproductive rights for all. This demonstrates that as a region we can

⁴ 80% of all refugees and internally displaced populations – Women's Refugee Commission

continue to progress the ICDP agenda, and that we can be even more ambitious in our aspirations under the Programme of Action.

Mr President,

Australia's commitment to women's economic empowerment and leadership, and to protecting women from violence, is a priority for us in Australia, and internationally, through our diplomacy and our aid.

Australia has set a benchmark for our aid program committing that at least 80 per cent of all of development activities must have a gender equality focus.

We are also prioritizing maternal and child health and family planning in our aid program.

Australia has a dedicated Ambassador for Women and Girls, Natasha Stott Despoja, who engages internationally to shift attitudes about the role, value and contribution of women and girls. We urge others to appoint such Ambassadors. This could be a powerful global network, working for the right of women and girls everywhere.

Mr President,

While we face serious challenges, we can deliver on the promise of the Programme of Action for the ICPD if we continue to shine a light on these important issues, and if we work together to deliver on our commitments.

Thank-you.