



AUSTRALIA



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International Conference for Population and Development**
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Australian National Statement

**Statement by Hon Julie Bishop MP,
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Australia**

(Check against delivery)

Thank you Mr President,

Women and children are bearing the brunt of increasingly violent conflict and protracted humanitarian crises around the world.

There is disturbing evidence that ISIL is targeting women and children; that they are kidnapping and selling girls, and systematically raping women and children.

It is 161 days since 273 girls were kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria – kidnapped because they were in school. There are reports that these girls are being sold.

The violent targeting of women and girls during conflict, the trafficking of women and children; child marriage caused by poverty and insecurity; high rates of early pregnancy; and increasing rates of HIV infection in adolescent girls are all intolerable.

All the while, basic global norms protecting the rights of women and girls are being challenged and questioned.

At this time, the ICPD Programme of Action, and its subsequent reviews, is as relevant as it was 20 years ago. We must protect the progress we have made. We reaffirm our commitment to seeing Programme of Action implemented in full. Together we must work to advance the rights of women and girls, and not allow these rights to be eroded.

Australia will not turn away from this commitment, at home, in our region, or beyond.

Over the last 20 years in our region, maternal mortality rates have dropped by 50 per cent; but we still face challenges.

UNICEF reports that in South Asia one in five girls are married before the age of 15, and in South and South-East Asia, almost one in 10 girls become pregnant before they are 16 – complications from pregnancy are a leading cause of death for girls and young women in developing countries.

And violence against women is a global scourge.

Protecting women from violence, promoting women's economic empowerment, and supporting women's leadership in the family, community, business and politics are priorities, both in Australia, and internationally through our diplomacy and our aid. We are determined to ensure that gender equality, women's empowerment, and sexual and reproductive health and rights are firmly embedded in the post-2015 development agenda.

Australia seeks to protect and promote the rights of women and girls in all settings, including humanitarian and conflict situations.

We work with the United Nations Population Fund to deliver family planning and other support services.

I witnessed the distribution of women's health supplies when I visited Tacloban in the Philippines following the Typhoon Haiyan. I saw first-hand the positive impact on women of our support. This exemplified our commitment to maternal and child health and family planning, including through our aid program.

In last Friday's Security Council debate on Iraq, I announced that Australia will provide a further \$2 million to the United Nations Population Fund to continue its work to protect women and girls in Iraq. We must all commit to ensure that Iraqi women are protected and supported.

The lives of women and girls should be free from violence. They should be free to exercise their rights to make choices about their own bodies, fertility and health.

Girls should have safe access to education. Girls who go to school and stay in school can get better jobs, they can participate in and

lead their communities and become powerful drivers of growth and development, peace and security

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.

Australia also has an Ambassador specifically for Women and Girls – former Senator Natasha Stott Despoja. We are one of only a handful of countries with a dedicated advocate at ambassador level, who is internationally engaged in working to shift attitudes about the role, value and contribution of women around the world.

Mr President,

I reaffirm Australia's commitment to the rights of women and girls
And I reaffirm Australia's commitment to action to protect,
promote and advance these rights, at home in Australia, throughout
our region and around the world.

Thank you.