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International priorities for women

Fact Sheet 7

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An international perspective

The Office for Women promotes women's human rights in international forums and reports on Australia's progress towards gender equality in relation to international treaties and gender action plans and provides policy advice and contributes to a whole-of-government focus on international matters affecting women.

United Nations

United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW):

- CEDAW is the major human rights treaty for women.
- Australia was one of the first countries to ratify CEDAW in 1983.
- Australia has implemented CEDAW domestically through various policy and legal developments such as the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*.
- Australia is obliged to report to the UN CEDAW Committee every four years on our progress.
- Australia most recently appeared before the 46th session of the UN CEDAW Committee in July 2010.
- Following Australia's appearance the UN CEDAW Committee issued a number of recommendations outlining how Australia could better meet its obligations under CEDAW.
- These recommendations are available from the Office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights website.
- In December 2008, Australia acceded to the CEDAW Optional Protocol, allowing individuals to bring a complaint directly to the United Nations CEDAW committee, after all domestic remedies have been exhausted. It also allows the UN to investigate claims of serious violations of CEDAW in Australia.

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW):

- CSW is the UN's highest forum on women's issues. It meets annually to discuss critical and emerging issues of concern to women globally and develop policy recommendations for the international community to achieve equality between men and women.
- The Office for Women leads the Australian delegation to CSW each year. The delegation also includes representatives from across the government as well as non-government representatives.
- The work program for CSW is based on the of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995.
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is an internationally agreed plan for achieving equality for women across 12 critical areas – poverty, education and training, health, the economy, power and decision-making, human rights, armed conflict, institutional mechanisms, the environment, women and the media, violence against women, and the girl child.

- Each year, CSW adopts a set of agreed conclusions – policy recommendations for government, intergovernmental organizations and civil society on the priority theme.
- In 2011, the Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Kate Ellis MP led the Australian delegation to the 55th session of CSW, which took place in New York from 22 Feb to 4 Mar 2011.
- This year, CSW considered the priority theme: “Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work”.
- In 2011, the Government funded two community sector delegates and one Indigenous delegate to participate on the Australian delegation.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security:

- UNSCR 1325 recognises the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and seeks to include women as full participants in post-conflict peace building and reconstruction efforts.
- In 2004, the Secretary-General of the UN called on member states to develop national action plans to progress the implementation of UNSCR 1325.
- The Government strongly supports Resolution 1325 and is committed to its implementation.
- The Government is in the process of developing a National Action Plan on women, peace and security to implement UNSCR 1325.

UN Women:

- UN Women was officially launched on 24 February 2011 during the 55th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.
- UN Women is better placed to advance global efforts to promote gender equality and empower women than the UN system has been able to do before bringing together four previously distinct parts of the UN system.
- Australia has been a strong advocate for strengthening the institutional arrangements for gender equality within the United Nations, and played an active and positive role in the establishment of UN Women, through AusAID.
- Australia was one of the first countries to pledge multi-year core funding for UN Women and will provide \$14.5 million¹ to UN Women over two years from 2011.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

Women Leaders’ Network (WLN):

- WLN is a key network of women from the 21 APEC economies, representing business, academia, government and NGOs.
- The WLN meets once a year to promote the participation of women in economic and trade-related activities, by identifying and advising on significant issues affecting women within the region.
- The 2010 WLN meeting was held in Japan in September.

APEC Gender Focal Point Network (GFPN):

- The GFPN is a forum of government officials within APEC that promotes gender equality in all APEC activities and provides policy advice on gender issues to APEC forums.
- The GFPN meets annually to discuss priorities for the year ahead.
- The 2010 GFPN meeting was held in Saitama, Japan in September.

Supporting Victims of Trafficking

- The Office for Women administers the Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program in partnership with the Australian Federal Police, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions as part of the Australian Government Anti-People Trafficking Strategy.
- In July 2009, the Government made changes to the Program to provide more flexible and accessible support to victims and their families.
- Victims of trafficking on any valid Australian visa, regardless of gender, the purpose for which they were trafficked, and whether they are willing and/or able to assist with an investigation and prosecution are able to access support under the Program.
- The Program provides individualised case management and includes income assistance, access to accommodation, medical treatment, basic legal advice, counseling, training and social support.

International development

- An overarching objective of Australia’s aid program is to help promote gender equality and empower women in partner countries.
- Gender equality is central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and is integral to all Australian Government aid policies, programs and initiatives.
- The Office for Women works closely with the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) to achieve positive outcomes for women.