



The New Zealand All-Party Parliamentary Group

**AFPPD Focus Group Meeting:
Sexual and Reproductive Health and
the Millennium Development Goals**

Cebu, Philippines, 29th - 30th June, 2005

**Attended by:
Lesley Soper, MP**

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction	2
2. Meeting proceedings	2
3. Plan of Action	4
Appendix 1.0 Meeting programme	6
Appendix 2.0 Role of parliamentarians in policy and advocacy, focusing on MDG3 – speech notes for Lesley Soper	9

1.0 Introduction

On 20th – 30th June, NZPPD member Lesley Soper attended a “Focus Group Meeting on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)” in Cebu, Philippines.

The meeting was organised by the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) and the Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD). The objective of the meeting was to develop a strategy and work plan for MPs to ensure SRH issues are recognised as key to achieving the MDGs. In particular, the AFPPD sought participation from MPs who could actively advocate to ensure SRH rights and services are reflected properly in the outcome of the World Summit on the MDGs (New York, 14th – 16th September) and the MDGs’ monitoring framework.

2.0 Meeting proceedings

During the two-day meeting, MPs from 14 countries in the region shared experiences, and information on policies and strategies relating to the MDGs, culminating in suggestions for an action plan for ensuring SRH is included in the MDGs. A full participant list is attached (Appendix One).

The meeting was to have been hosted by Hon. Nerissa Soon-Ruiz, chair of the Philippines Congress Special Committee on the MDGs, who unfortunately couldn’t attend because of political events. However, vice chair of the committee, Mario Aguja, was able to attend for part of the time.

The format of the meeting was informal, a deliberate strategy to facilitate open and frank discussion.

Local media attempted to attend the meeting but were quickly removed so as not to restrict discussion. AFPPD held a formal press conference later in the day, resulting in an article about the forum in the *Sun-Star Cebu* entitled “Forum looks into links between poverty, reproductive health”. The same page ran articles about a population, environmental protection and health programme in the Philippines, and latest statistics on HIV/AIDS (copies attached).

The meeting included presentations from excellent resource people. In particular, Sultan Aziz, Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and Pacific Division, provided a presentation on the Millennium Project and Quick Wins, and Chaiyos Kunansont, UNFPA Advisor on HIV/AIDS and STIs, presented on MDG 5 (improve maternal health) and MDG 6 (Combat HIV/AIDS).

Lesley was asked to act as a resource person on the role of parliamentarians in policy and advocacy in relation to MDG 3 (gender equality and women’s

empowerment). In preparation for this and the meeting in general, Lesley had been briefed by NZAID and MFAT about the issues and challenges for New Zealand in relation to the MDGs, and relevant policies and strategies.

A copy of Lesley's speech is attached. This presentation provided an opportunity to inform participants about the NZPPD "open hearing" into violence against women and children held in March, and to distribute the NZPPD action plan that resulted from this.

In their briefing, NZAID and MFAT had drawn attention to New Zealand's position on inclusion of SRH in the MDGs. At recent events/fora, including the Commission on Population and Development, this position has consistently been to support greater recognition and integration of SRH and rights through the MDGs and to call for the 2005 World Summit outcome to fully reflect this priority. However, New Zealand's position is also that any amending of the MDGs, whether it be goals or targets, could be potentially damaging to the global MDG consensus; that given the current international climate driven by the position of the United States and other conservative groups, there are risks that the MDGs could be opened up for relitigation and potential watering down or roll back of agreed commitments made at the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) Platform for Action and the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (1994) Programme of Action.

However, the NZPPD supports a strategy that recommends additional targets and indicators, including an additional target under MDG 5 of "universal access to reproductive health information and services by 2015". Copies of an FPAID strategy for linking SRH and the MDGs (adapted from an IPPF strategy) were distributed to participants for their information.

The meeting concluded with a session to finalise the strategy. However, suggestions for the basis of this strategy had become very general, having lost the focus on SRH. Lesley drew attention to this, and the meeting agreed there should be a very brief preamble and recommitment to precede the points in the strategy. New Zealand provided the wording for this.

**3.0 Plan of Action adopted at the Parliamentarian Focus Group Meeting on
SRH and MDGs
at
Cebu, Philippines, 29-30 July 2005**

PREAMBLE:

In 1994 at the International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD), governments worldwide recognized that ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services for all and protecting reproductive rights were essential strategies for improving the lives of all people.

In the years since ICPD, evidence has accumulated that when people can exercise their reproductive rights, they experience far-reaching benefits throughout their lives, as do their families, their communities, and their countries. Girls are more likely to complete primary education and go on to secondary school. Women are more likely to experience safe pregnancy and childbirth, and their children are less likely to die in infancy. Women and men of all ages are better equipped to protect themselves from sexually transmissible infections (STIs) including HIV. And women are more likely to be empowered to make strategic life decisions and participate equally in all spheres of society.

RECOMMITMENT:

Parliamentarians at this meeting therefore recommit to working to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services for all by 2015 as a core strategy to achieve the MDGs.

Overall

1. Focus on MDGs as whole since each goal is interlinked.
2. Conduct feedback activities based on the discussion during the focus group meeting
3. Strengthening linkage between sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS

Constituency Level

1. Reinforce community advocacy that will produce champions for MDGs
 - Parliamentarians should take initiative to conduct conferences/forums in their respective constituencies
 - Maximize support of local leadership
2. Monitor if reproductive health services are being delivered at the constituencies
3. Evaluate what has been done and what need to be done towards achieving MDGs

National Level

1. Make a social audit on what has been done towards Achievement of MDGs
 - Set-up special committee on MDGs to monitor activities
2. Monitor and enforce laws to achieve MDGs
 - On health: Give priority to primary health care

- It is essential to give focus on education in order to achieve the other MDG targets.
 - Give priority to policies/programs focusing on the elimination of poverty.
3. Monitor and ensure provision of annual budget for MDGs.
 - Set-up special fund for the MDGs for each country and Parliament should monitor its utilization
 - Influence budgetary allocation on MDGs. Motivate executive branch to implement MDGs and to prioritize MDGs in budgetary allocation including sexual and reproductive health related activities
 - Ensure allocation of resources to reproductive health services
 - Dialogue with government so that there is no duplication in terms of budgetary allocations
 - Ensure resources for Parliamentary activities on MDGs
 4. Assist other parliamentarians at the regional Level in relation to achieving MDGs
 - Motivate parliamentary standing committee members to make government to promote MDGs. It must be time-bounded.
 5. Raise awareness in the parliament on SRH and MDGs
 - Encourage parliamentarians to ask questions on MDGs to pressure government to promote MDGs. Ask for a special debate on the implementation of MDGs. They will be forced to confront issues on its implementation
 - Conduct studies among parliamentarians on their knowledge on MDGs; Awareness survey among parliamentarians
 - Conduct capability-building activities among parliamentarians
 6. Make governments to recognize that addressing reproductive Health is a strategy in the elimination of Poverty
 7. Motivate the government in regards to MDGs so that there will be healthy discussion on its importance.
 8. Maximize media support for SRH and MDGs
 9. Parliamentarians should write to the speaker based on the discussions on the MDGs made during the Focus Group Meeting.
 10. Parliamentarians should supervise and follow-up the role of the government in promoting of MDGs at the local levels
 11. Effort should be made to include a parliamentarian in the national delegation to UN General Assembly on MDGs. Briefing session should be organized by National Committee for the delegates with help of UNFPA and AFPPD

International Level

1. Develop global partnership and cooperation between developed and developing countries
 - Constant sharing of information among MDG champions coming from different countries.
 - Annual gathering among MDG champions if possible

APPENDIX ONE

**Focus Group Meeting on SRH and MDGs
Cebu, Philippines, 29-30 June 2005**

I. Participants

	Country	Name	Title	Organisation
1	Australia	Ms. Claire Moore	Senator	Australia Senate
2	Australia	Mr. Matthew Sammels	Manager, Policy and Advocacy	Secretariat for the Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development
3	Cambodia	Mr. Than Sina	MP, Vice-Chair of Commission on Financial and Banking	Parliament of Cambodia
4	Fiji	Dr. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau	Senator	Parliament of Fiji
5	India	Dr. P.J Kurien	MP	Parliament of India
6	Indonesia	Mr. Marissa Haque	MP	Parliament of Indonesia
7	Indonesia	Ms. Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, SH.	MP	Parliament of Indonesia
8	Iran	Dr. Khas Ahmadi	MP	Parliament of Iran
9	Laos	Dr. Tounalom Akhom	MP, Member of Committee on Economic and Financial Affairs	Lao National Assembly
10	Malaysia	Dr. Junaidy bin Abdul Wahab	MP	Malaysian Parliament
11	NZ	Ms. Lesley Soper	MP	Parliament of New Zealand
12	NZ	Mr. Karyn Ammundsen	Communications Coordinator	Family Planning Association International Development (FPAID)
13	Pakistan	Ms.Gul-e-Farkhanda Siddiqui	MP, Chairperson of the National Assembly on Population Welfare	National Assembly of Pakistan

14	Philippines	Ms. Nerissa Soon Ruiz,	MP, Chairperson of MDG Special Committee, Vice chair of PLCPD	Philippine Congress
16	Philippines	Mr. Mario J. Aguja	Vice - Chairperson of Special Committee on the MDGs	House of Representatives, Philippines
17	Sri Lanka	Mr. Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena	MP, Deputy Minister of Health Care	Parliament of Sri Lanka
18	Thailand	Mr. Khan Surakul	Senator, Air Chief Marshal	Thai Senate Standing Committee on Public Health,
19	Vietnam	Ms Do Phuong Thao	MP	Parliament of Vietnam
20	Vietnam	Mr. Dang Nhu Loi	MP	Parliament of Vietnam
21	Vietnam	Dr. Nguyen Duc Thu	Officer	Vietnam Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (VAPPD)

II. Resource Persons

	Name	Title	Organisation
22	Mr. Sultan Aziz	Director	UNFPA Asia and Pacific Division
23	Mr. Chaiyos Kunansont	Advisor on HIV/AIDS and STIs	UNFPA Country Support Team
24	Mr. Benjamin D De Leon	President	The Forum for Family Planning and Development

III. Secretariat

	Name	Title	Organisation
25	Mr. Ramon D. San Pascual	Executive Secretary	Philippine Legislators Committee on Population and Development Foundation (PLCPD)
26	Ms. Ruth Irene Reyes	Executive Secretary	Philippine Legislators Committee on Population and Development Foundation (PLCPD)

27	Mr. Ernesto Almocera, Jr.	PLCPD focal person for the MDG activities	Philippine Legislators Committee on Population and Development Foundation (PLCPD)
28	Ms. Ethel Mendiola	Manager of the Information and Communication Unit	Philippine Legislators Committee on Population and Development Foundation (PLCPD)
29	Mr. Shiv Khare	Executive Director	AFPPD
30	Ms. Miho Yamazaki	Program Associate	AFPPD

APPENDIX TWO

Focus Group Meeting on SRH and MDGs, Cebu Island, 29-30 June

Speech notes for Lesley Soper, 29th June, Session 4

Role of Parliamentarians in Policy and Advocacy focusing on MDG 3: promote gender equality and empower women.

The Millennium Declaration and MDGs have opened a new door for the advancement of gender equality. Used to their best potential, they can be the means by which the insidious link between gender inequalities, the waste and destruction of women's human potential, and the seemingly endless reproduction of poverty is brought into sharper focus, and finally overcome.

I am pleased to be here on behalf of the New Zealand Parliamentarians' Group on Population and Development, through our association with AFPPD, and to discuss with you in this session the role of parliamentarians in policy and advocacy in relation to MDG 3: promote gender equality and empower women.

The New Zealand Parliamentarians' Group on Population and Development - or NZPPD - was established in 1998 in response to the International Conference on Population and Development. Our aim is to create a supportive environment nationally and internationally for implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action by:

- Increasing informed debate and information about global population and development issues, including sexual and reproductive health; and
- Creating awareness of the important role parliamentarians can play in influencing and shaping policy.

In 2003, our group agreed to a strategic focus on four areas, one of which is improving the status of women. The others are encouraging the New Zealand

government to commit to a timetable for achieving the target of allocating 0.7% of GNI to ODA, HIV/AIDS and sustainable development.

NZPPD also has a geographic focus, which is Asia and the Pacific, and I'd like to talk a bit about how we advocate internationally for gender equality and the empowerment of women. But first I'd like to give you a brief picture of the domestic situation in New Zealand.

While there is still some work to be done, New Zealand is well known for its gender policies in relation to the workplace, and is making inroads on issues such as work-life balance, pay equity and flexible working hours – this is currently in a bill that is due to come before the House. We have a Ministry of Women's Affairs which is expected to work cross-sectorally, and all papers sent to Cabinet in relation to social development are expected to include gender analysis. Our human rights legislation means that women can not be discriminated against in employment or other aspects of life.

NZPPD is involved domestically in ensuring New Zealand does progress further on gender issues. For example, our chair, Steve Chadwick, was a key speaker at the International Women's Day event last year; and our Minister of Women's Affairs Ruth Dyson launched this document – the Action Plan for New Zealand Women in March 2004.

The Action Plan concentrates on goals, milestones and monitoring mechanisms in the areas of Economic Sustainability, Work-Life Balance and Women's Wellbeing; was widely consulted on throughout the country, and has been actively worked on since 2004 by our Ministry of Women's Affairs (a Ministry set up by a previous Labour government) and by our NGO groups.

One gender issue that the NZPPD has really chosen to focus on has been that of violence against women, as we have a long way to go in New Zealand, although the Domestic Violence Act (1995) was regarded as a very significant piece of legislation internationally.

This year - funded by AFPPD – our group held an Open Hearing into violence against women and children. I have copies of the NZPPD action plan that came out of this hearing, and I can forward a copy of the report from the hearing, currently being published, to anyone who is interested.

MPs from across the political spectrum attended this hearing to hear from government ministries and NGOs working in the area of violence against women and children.

In New Zealand, despite strong support for laws and strategies to reduce violence against women and children, violence in the home and gender-based violence continues at an astonishingly high rate.

This has a major impact on the lives of women, including their sexual and reproductive health, and the wellbeing of them and their children.

As a result of the hearing, the government has formulated a plan of action to ensure New Zealand fulfils both its domestic and international commitments to eliminate violence against women and children, including its commitments as a signatory to CEDAW, and the report from the hearing has contributed to this.

However, as I said, NZPPD's key focus is on international population and development issues and, specifically, on Asia and the Pacific, and we work closely with our parliamentary colleagues in the region, particularly AFPPD and the Pacific Parliamentary Assembly for Population and Development.

For example, through these linkages, MPs from New Zealand and the Pacific were able to participate in a study tour to Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam last year, a key aim of which was to help strengthen Pacific parliamentarians' understanding of HIV so they are better informed to influence the way in which their countries respond to the pandemic. A key focus of this issue was the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and children because, of course, it is now evident that a multi-pronged approach is needed to target the mainstream

population whom HIV/AIDS is now affecting. At particular risk are the wives of high-risk men – women whose only fault was to marry a man they believed to be faithful.

There is much to be done to advocate in relation to women and HIV, as women are more vulnerable than their male partners both biologically and as a result of inequality.

Advocacy strategies on issues such as MDG 3 include:

- Asking questions in the house and of Ministers.
- Issuing press releases on these issues.
- Participating in regional and international conferences, and ensuring wherever possible that we participate on the drafting committee to ensure gender equality is reflected in conference statements and declarations.

MPs can commit themselves to:

- Enacting, publicizing and enforcing laws and policies that promote and protect the human rights of the girl child and young women, that ensure women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making at all levels, and that eliminate all forms of violence, coercion and discrimination against women, including various forms of harmful traditional, cultural and religious practices.
- Removing all gender gaps and inequalities in women's education, employment and livelihoods and adopting and enforcing measure to educate girls, develop their technical and vocation skills and teach them to read and write.
- Promoting access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services, including sex education, contraception and emergency obstetric care, and the significant reduction of unsafe abortion and

maternal mortality and morbidity as a public health issue and as a reproductive rights concern.

In times of conflict or other emergency situations, for example the December Tsunami, MPs have a real chance to ensure the reproductive needs of affected women are met. Recently our chair wrote to our aid Minister to ensure that women's reproductive health needs are a central component of New Zealand's contribution towards tsunami relief.

We can also work with civil society. Domestically, my government recognizes the significant role of NGOs for example in successfully contributing to and implementing policy. Their contribution is a daily feature of the workings of government.

New Zealand was the first country to give women the vote in 1893 and today we take our responsibilities under international agreements relating to gender equality and women's empowerment seriously. We have had some success and we have made some progress both in terms of policies and the machinery of government necessary to support those policies. We do however, like many countries, have more work to do and, knowing this, have identified clear goals for improving the well being of women and girls.

We have added our voice to the growing call for the implementation of women's rights as set down in ICPD and the Beijing Declaration. The NZPPD feels strongly that the MDGs need to be more explicit in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment, and believe MPs have a key role to play in encouraging governments to support that, and to sign up to CEDAW. In particular, NZPPD believes that universal access to sexual and reproductive health by 2015 and the protection of reproductive rights are critical for achieving the MDGs, particularly those concerned with maternal health, HIV/AIDS, gender equality and poverty eradication. We will continue to advocate for this as the major outcome of the September World Summit.