



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

**Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Human Rights Sub-Committee**

MEDIA RELEASE

Issued: 3 December 2015

*Chair: The Hon Philip Ruddock MP
Deputy: Senator Anne McEwen*

Empowering women and girls in the Indo-Pacific region

Improving women's health and education, and promoting women's economic empowerment and their leadership in the Indo-Pacific region are topics covered in a report released today by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT).

The committee tabled its report *Empowering Women and Girls—the Human Rights Issues confronting Women and Girls in the Indo-Pacific Region*.

Chair of the JSCFADT's Human Rights Sub-Committee, The Hon Philip Ruddock MP, stated that the inquiry was a timely review of the obstacles impeding women and girls from realising their full potential as human beings—as social, economic and political participants—in a very diverse region.

Mr Ruddock said that high rates of violence against women and girls in parts of the region are indicative of their broader disempowerment within their families and communities.

"Tragically, violence perpetrated against women appears to be endemic in our neighbouring nations in South Asia and the Pacific region," Mr Ruddock said.

However, despite there being many laudable initiatives focussed on women's empowerment, the committee found a paucity of reliable evidence on what works and what doesn't work in addressing the many challenges confronting women in the region.

"For this reason, the committee has made a number of recommendations concerning the need for further research to underpin future policy and development assistance programs," Mr Ruddock said.

The committee's inquiry attracted 94 submissions from governments, organisations, businesses and academics from across the Indo-Pacific region. Evidence from faith-based organisations, particularly those working in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific region, provided invaluable insight into the potential to promote gender equality in these communities.

The report contains 33 recommendations which address the key areas of inequality discussed in the report: women's legal empowerment; the incidence of violence against women and girls; improving women's health; education as a right for girls; promoting women into leadership roles; and women's economic empowerment.

The final two chapters of the report focus on the inquiry's fourth term of reference, providing an overview of the 'gender effectiveness' of current Australian aid programs and making core recommendations on aid funding, monitoring, program planning and longevity.

The full report, information about the inquiry, including copies of submissions and public hearing transcripts, can be found on the committee's website at www.aph.gov.au/jfadt.

For media inquiries:

Contact the Chair of the JSCFADT Human Rights Sub-Committee, The Hon Philip Ruddock MP, on (02) 9980 1822 (Electorate Office) or via Mr Jeremy Greenwood on 0413 280 799.