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To Chair: Mr Luke Simpkins MP; Deputy: Senator Anne McEwen jscfadt@aph.gov.au

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Human Rights Sub-Committee

Human rights for women and girls -- Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific region

Women's Plans Foundation appreciates this inquiry as highly significant and welcomes the opportunity to submit our insights.

Girls: Girls should have the acknowledged right to understand their bodies and their roles. Puberty and the developing capacity to bear children are vital life stages. Whereas developed countries have found that sex education postpones teenage pregnancies¹, in patriarchal cultures, in parts of PNG for example, the fertility of girls is dealt with by early marriage. The assumption is that the bride price paid ensures that the bride must bear babies at her husband's requirement². Ownership of girls and women is thus an issue, with men assuming ownership of women's bodies, resulting in early pregnancy, resulting high mortality rates, low education and limited identity for half of the population. Social education reduces economic dependency on child bride practices.

Reproductive health education for all should give girls in the Asia Pacific region a chance to pursue more equitable relationships and planned parenthood.

Women: Aspirations for girls are inspired by women's example. Where women can space births to regain health while nurturing each child, the family and community gain, and maternal and child mortality reduce. Women can share in the earning capacity of the family, and resources can go into schooling all the children born. Women have much to give beyond basic chores and constant child-bearing, and with access to family planning, women can do much to break the poverty cycle.

Access to family planning for all is transformational in lifting women's health, education, prosperity and involvement in decision-making.

Women's Plans Foundation is a charitable trust, raising funds for education in reproductive health and contraception, advocating the integration of a family planning component in overseas programs.

Women's Plans Foundation,

¹ Guttmacher Institute report, "[U.S. Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010: National and State Trends by Age, Race and Ethnicity](#)," by Kathryn Kost and Stanley Henshaw.

² WPF YouTube of PNG interview http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66G6R56K_GU .