



***Australian Federation of University Women Inc.***

**PO Box 224, Enmore NSW 2042**

<http://www.afuw.org.au>

10 March 2009

The Hon. Stephen Smith MP  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Smith

**Re Press Releases on AusAid Family Planning Guidelines and Increased Support for UNIFEM;  
Request for Australian Support for Proposed UN Agency for Women**

It is with great pleasure that I write on behalf of members of the Australian Federation of University Women to congratulate you and the Government on the announcement of the decision to change the Family Planning Guidelines for Australia's overseas development assistance program to support the same range of family planning services for women in developing countries as are supported for women in Australia, subject to the national laws of the relevant nation concerned.

We are entirely supportive of the idea that avoiding terminations through family planning services and advice should continue to be a priority, but believe that the decision now taken meets the reality of the experience of very many women in a world where poverty and maternal and infant death are all too frequent.

We would also like to congratulate you on the announcement of increased Australian support for UNIFEM, and are pleased to see that particular attention is to be given to the Pacific region as well as Asia. AFUW, as a member of the Pacific Graduate Women's Network, is well aware of the need for development assistance in the Pacific nations.

Your two announcements make a wonderful trifecta with the earlier announcement by the Attorney-General and Minister Plibersek of the entry into force in Australia of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

You may, however, not be surprised to find that there is still an Oliver Twist request for more. In 2006 and again in September 2007, we wrote to the then Prime Minister, Mr Howard, endorsing the *Statement on Reforming Gender Equality* issued by the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel for UN System-wide Coherence and urging in particular that Australia should give its support to the Panel's recommendation that there should be a UN Women's Agency,

intended to consolidate three existing U.N. entities - the U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the U.N. Division for the Advancement of Women. We also urged that Australia support recommendations for adequate funding of such an Agency.

As the proposal is about to be put to the members states of the UN, with strong support from the President of the General Assembly, we have noted the enthusiastic case for the Agency made recently by Stephen Lewis, the former U.N. Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa. His insistence on the need for a specific agency includes this dismissal of counter-arguments that women's interests are best dealt with by gender mainstreaming:

Gender mainstreaming has failed in every respect. What happens with gender mainstreaming is you say we'll mainstream gender into that and then no one ever thinks of it again. They say it's taken care of - it's "mainstream". And the truth is the gender mainstreaming simply sustains women's inequality - that's what gender mainstreaming is. It's a recipe for inequality because unless you deal with women in a serious way, giving it special consideration, until you have equality then women will always be struggling.

We believe that it is very important that countries that pride themselves on looking after the rights of their own women nationals should take an international stand on the Women's Agency and should be prepared to speak up for it as a donor nation. Accordingly, we seek an assurance of such support from the Australian Government,

Yours Sincerely,

(Dr) Jennifer Strauss AM  
President, AFUW Inc.  
2/12 Tollington Ave  
East Malvern 3145

cc.

The Prime Minister, The Hon. Kevin Rudd MP  
The Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP