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Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP  
Chair  
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA, ACT 2600

Dear Ms Vamvakinou,

### **Inquiry into the Rights of Women and Children**

Please accept the following as my submission to the Committee's inquiry into the Rights of Women and Children and Child Road Safety improvement in Southeast Asia.

More than 600 children are killed every day due to road traffic collisions, and tens of thousands are injured, often suffering lifelong disabilities. Road injuries are the leading cause of death for children and young adults aged 5-29 years. Families that experience road injuries often face enormous emotional and economic costs. People of lower socioeconomic class are more likely to be involved in a road accident often perpetuating the poverty cycle. Mothers become primary carers for road injured children further limiting women economic prospects. There are several evidence-based road safety measures, including low-cost interventions, aimed at reducing child road traffic deaths and injuries. However, Child Road Safety improvement in low and middle-income countries has been marginal in the past decades.

When I moved to Australia in late 2012, I was acutely conscious of the children's road safety predicament in many Indo-Pacific countries (Section 1). I was also experienced at integrating and transcending individual cultures into practical road safety collaborations. I, therefore, aimed at leveraging my global network and engaging a diverse group of international organisations in the delivery of practical grass-root child road safety actions in the region. Efforts materialised into two school-based Child Road Programs in Thailand (Section 2).

Building upon these global successful programs, I am reaching out to seek your advice and support to also help with Vietnamese Child Road Safety by facilitating an important study tour for national-level Vietnamese government partners to meet with Australian stakeholders aiming at creating a policy and procedure framework for Safe School Zones to be implemented in Vietnam (Section 3).

#### **1. Regional, Age and Gender Road Safety Inequality**

Road accidents are responsible for 1.3 million fatalities and 50 million injuries yearly worldwide. Over 90% of fatal accidents occur in low and middle-income countries even though these countries have approximately 60% of the world's vehicles. The proportion of patients who die before reaching a hospital in low-income countries is over twice that in high-income countries. Rapid economic development is affecting motorisation rates and increasing road safety hazards in many low and middle-income countries.

Road traffic deaths in Southeast Asia is the world second highest at around 20 deaths per 100,000 population.

Thailand has the second highest road traffic fatality rate in the world (36.2 deaths per 100,000 population) of which over 70% are motorcycle riders. Road traffic accidents kill over 2,600 Thai children a year, while injuring and disabling an additional over 72,500 boys and girls. Wearing a helmet can reduce the risk of death by 40% and the risk of serious injury by 70%. While over 1.3 million children travel as a motorcycle passenger every day, only 7% of children wear helmets nationally and only 16% of children wear helmets in Bangkok.

Vietnamese record for road fatalities is the second worse in Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, road accidents are one of the leading causes of death for children ages 5-14 years, with 2,150 children dying on the road every year. Also, according to official sources, for every child that dies, four are permanently disabled and another ten are seriously injured. Vietnam still faces significant policy gaps around school safety zone, namely that there is no standard school zone definition to guide local governments around minimum road infrastructure safety requirements for schools, despite over 17 million children commuting between home and school 2-4 times per day. Speed in schools' vicinity – often largely exceeding internationally recommended school zone speed limits – has been identified as an important factor leading to road accidents in Vietnam. Five percent reduction on average speed can reduce the number of fatal accidents by up to 30%.

Road accidents cost Thailand and Vietnam 11% and 9% of their respective GDP.

Women bear an unequal share of the burden of road accidents. They have lower mobility rates and, therefore, are less likely to die due to road accidents despite having nearly 50% higher risk of serious injury and five times higher risk of whiplash injury. However, women disproportionately serve as the primary caretaker for family members, including children, with long-term road injuries, which in turn socially/economically disempowers women, limits workplace gender diversity and perpetuates disadvantages for single mothers. This is increasingly important given the economic and social fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected women worldwide.

There has been a call for strengthening regional coordination among international partners to tackle the current child road crisis. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 74/299 (2020) declared a Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030, with the target to reduce road traffic deaths and injuries by at least 50% during that period. Road safety is an expediter of multiple 2030 Sustainable Development Goals - including SDG3: Good Health and Well-being, SDG4: Quality Education, SDG5: Gender Equality, SDG10: Reduced Inequality, SDG17: Partnerships for the Goals. SDG11.2 specifically calls for safe, sustainable and accessible transportation systems for everyone, with an emphasis on people in vulnerable situations, women, children, older adults and people with disabilities. Child road safety is also aligned with Australian's Aids priorities.

Response to Child Road Safety in Southeast Asian requires greater international awareness and collaboration in the implementation of evidence-based reproducible local actions.

## **2. Australian's role in school-based Child Helmet Programs (2015 and 2018) in Thailand**

Child Road Safety directly impacts children's wellbeing and women's opportunities in countries like Thailand. My contribution to minimise the problem involved engaging international cooperation and funds into two school-based Child Helmets Programs, 2015 and 2017, in Bangkok, Thailand.

Programs aimed at protecting primary school students from potential life-threatening injuries caused by road accidents were implemented in two primary schools, *Prathom Taveetha Pisek* School (2015) and *Wat Rachasingkorn* School (2018). They included promotion of helmet wearing, encouragement of safer road user behaviour, provision of free high-quality helmets for children and teachers as well as establishment of road safety local capacity by educating schools' staff and wider community members.

Nearly 2,000 students, teachers and parents directly benefitted from the programs whereas an estimated over 50,000 people received indirect benefits. Dissemination to the wider community included training for community members, distributing flyers, sponsoring targeted social media posts as well as billboards, online campaigns, news coverage and word-of-mouth.

The programs, which were designed and implemented by the non-profit AIP Foundation, were comprehensively monitored and assessed for future refinement. Data collected at different stages of the Thai projects was also analysed by the Mathematics Department at *Universidade Nova de Lisboa*, Portugal. The results of this work were presented at the *2018 Australasian Road Safety Conference*, in Sydney.

Programs gained support and were partially funded by the Australian Road Research Board (ARRB); other Programs' sponsors were based in Asia (Thailand, Taiwan and Hong Kong) and Europe (Portugal and England). Both programs were supported by the Western Australian Rotary Club Matilda Bay and the latter benefitted from the first world Rotary Global Grant for Road Safety (awarded by Rotary International in Chicago). Beyond expectations, the 2017 project resulted in a change in international policy, leading to the inclusion of Road Safety as a Rotary International Focus Area.

The programs had wide media coverage, including a four-minute film shot in Western Australia by the Portuguese National Television (extract from the *Rádio Televisão Portuguesa* program, *Hora dos Portugueses*, Episode 9, Season 7, 28th Feb. 2021).

Two other subsequent projects were planned in Thailand and Indonesia in 2020. An application to a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Friendship Grant – Round 2 was submitted for the Thai2020 project whilst the Indonesia project was being facilitated by the Western Australia Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation under the framework of the *2020 Western Australia-East Java 30<sup>th</sup> Sister States Anniversary*. Both were critically affected by COVID-19 and were not delivered.

### **3. Vietnam Australia Bilateral Study Tour on Safe School Zones (2023)**

As a follow-up of the impactful Australian contribution for Child Road Safety in Thailand, I have been asked to support the Vietnamese Government improve road infrastructure legislation through the prioritisation of school zone-related infrastructure projects for youth. This action will also assist building stronger bilateral relations between Vietnam and Australia to collaboratively address child road safety issues in the region.

Between 2018 and 2020, the *Slow Zones, Safe Zones Program* in Pleiku City – capital of Gia Lai province, Vietnam – succeeded at implementing various measures to improve road safety around schools. It served as a model for advocating for similar legal decisions on a provincial and national level.

Hence, the subsequent *Safe School Zones (SSZ) Program* was established to create a policy and procedure framework for safe school zones to be constructed and implemented around the country. It has delivered comprehensive safety interventions in various cities and secured a legislative decision that limits speed in school zones in one city. As a result of this accomplishment, the Vietnamese Government won the prestigious 2020 Prince Michael Road Safety Award.

These programs have been a collaborative initiative between the Vietnamese government, private sector and international stakeholders. Their implementations have been coordinated by the nonprofit AIP Foundation.

The *Slow Zones*, *Safe Zones Program* and *Safe School Zones*'s incremental success is leading to an expansion of advocacy efforts for establishing Safe School Zones nationwide. However, the country would benefit from the expansion of technical knowledge and a better understanding of practices as well as deepen learning on interagency coordination. Hence, a five-day study tour for Vietnamese government officials from key agencies to Australia is being organised in early 2023. AIP Foundation (Vietnam) has been commissioned to organise this study tour and, in turn, it has asked my support in Australia.

The study tour viability requires identification of:

- Australian sponsors contributing to the 13 government officials – including high-level representatives from the National Traffic Safety Committee, Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Education and Training – study tour; and
- key Australian stakeholders (government, NGOs and academic institutions) who are interested in joining workshops during the tour and sharing their expertise and knowledge as it relates to building safe and sustainable road infrastructure, particularly for children.

I would greatly appreciate your support in helping me make this tour a reality.

### **Conclusion**

Australia has had a key role in the success of Child Helmet Programs (2015 and 2108) in Bangkok, Thailand. Support to a 2023 study-tour from Vietnamese decision-makers to Australia to share Child Road Safety knowledge, expertise and financial resources could further enhance the Australian international contribution to decreasing the number and severity of child road accidents on their journey to and from school. Safe commuting contributes to protecting children rights to equal and quality education and increases children ability to reach their fullest potential. The significant number of child road injuries disproportionately affect women who become primary carer for injured family members.

If the Committee needs any further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

