



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE

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

*Chair: Mr Luke Simpkins MP
Deputy: Senator Anne McEwen*

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

A new inquiry will investigate challenges facing women and girls of the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region to improve their human rights.

The Human Rights Sub-Committee will conduct the inquiry and is keen to hear the perspectives of women from across the region so it can make practical policy recommendations that will make a real contribution to women's empowerment and gender equality.

Sub-Committee chair Luke Simpkins said a focus on women and girls was vital to the advancement of human rights, economic development and peace and stability in Australia's region.

"As the father of two daughters I know that while there have been great advances in ensuring respect for human rights globally over the past century, much of this progress is yet to touch the lives of hundreds of millions of women and girls," he said.

Mr Simpkins said the reasons for this are complex and range across several areas including education, health, economic opportunity, family violence and even culture.

"Women make up the majority of the world's poor," he said.

"One third of women will experience physical violence in their lifetimes, and some are trapped in conflicts where rape is perpetrated as a weapon of war.

"In many countries, women and girls are often denied access to education and excluded from political processes. Fewer than one in five parliamentarians globally are women."

The Sub-Committee will inquire into and report on:

- barriers and impediments to enhancing the human rights of women and girls, especially regarding the impact of family and sexual violence, women's leadership and economic opportunities;
- achievements to date in advancing human rights in these key areas;
- implications for economic and social development in the region of promoting women and girls' human rights; and
- the effectiveness of Australian programs to support efforts to improve human rights of women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region.

Currently, around half of Australia's aid budget is spent on initiatives, policies and programs that have a significant focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The Sub-Committee invites public submissions addressing the terms of reference for this inquiry. The closing date for submission's will be Thursday 22 May 2014. The Sub-Committee encourages the lodgement of electronic submissions from anyone with an interest in the issues raised by these terms of reference.

Further information on the inquiry, including how to lodge a submission, is available on the Committee's website: website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt

For media comment: contact the Sub-Committee Chair, Mr Luke Simpkins MP, on (02) 6277 4009 or via Mr Bill Coghlan on the same number. For all other inquiries, contact the Inquiry Secretary, on 02 6277 4318 or visit the committee website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfact