

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Ligue internationale des femmes pour la paix et la liberté
Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad
Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit

Consultative Status with United Nations ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO

Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO and UNICEF

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17 March 2009

Hon Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Re: AusAID Guidelines for Australian Assistance for Family Planning Activities

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) wrote to you twice in recent months regarding the limitations of funding and restrictions on the scope of work that Family Planning organisations could perform in developing countries. We now wish to congratulate you and the Government on your decision to rescind the restrictions on information and education programs in women's health in developing countries which included references to abortion or post-coital contraception.

These restrictions have previously meant that Family Planning programs in developing countries have suffered from limitations on provision of information, and lack of funding. Women in these countries have the highest rates of maternal mortality associated with unplanned pregnancy and unskilled abortion arising from inadequate access to information and contraceptive services. The better support for programs of education for women and training of service providers will have the effect of reducing unplanned pregnancy and enabling better spacing of births.

Your decision also means that Australia is better supporting the UN Millennium Development Goals of 2000 and the decisions taken at the UN Conference in Nairobi in 1985, and many other international conferences that:

“The ability of women to control their own fertility forms an important basis for the enjoyment of other rights.” (Par 156)

WILPF also congratulates United States President Obama for taking similar action in removing the restrictions dating back to 1984 which removed funding for Family Planning organisations even when they were working in a country where abortion is legal.

Once again, we warmly congratulate the Australian Government on this important change.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Picone and Ruth Russell
Joint National Coordinators