

## SPEECH NOTES

Dr Jackie Blue, MP and NZPPD Chair

Title: Population: The Heart of Development

Address to **'Eliminating World Poverty: Global Goals and Regional Progress'**

20<sup>th</sup> March 2008

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Kia Ora. Hello. My sincere thanks for the opportunity to take part in this symposium. It is both an honour and a pleasure to be hosting the opening of what promises to be an insightful and valuable event.

I have been invited to speak in my role as Chair of the New Zealand Parliamentarians' Group on Population and Development (commonly referred to as NZPPD). I was elected Chair of this group in February this year, a role that I am both proud to hold, and genuinely committed to.

For those of you who are not aware of NZPPD, the group provides a forum for New Zealand parliamentarians to engage and act on international population and development issues, with a particular focus on Asia and the Pacific. The NZPPD is a cross-party group, with currently 45 members representing just fewer than 40% of all New Zealand MPs.

The NZPPD has a strategic focus on five key areas:

- Sexual and reproductive health and rights, including HIV and AIDS
- Overseas Development Assistance
- Sustainable development
- The status of women
- A geographical focus on Asia and the Pacific, increasingly the Pacific

At the core of NZPPD's approach to international development is the acknowledgement that population issues, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender, are paramount to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and positive development in general.

The NZPPD was excited to hear about this event, and keen to be involved. This symposium provides an opportunity to address pivotal questions facing New Zealand, indeed the world, in 2009.

- 1) What are the main challenges facing us in relation to our shared goal of achieving positive international development?
- 2) What are the goals we have set ourselves and what progress are we making to achieve these, particularly at home in our own Pacific region?
- 3) And importantly, what action needs to be taken and by whom in order to ensure we reach these goals? Including, what role can New Zealand have in all of this?

We have a fantastic and varied range of speakers to help us all work through these questions. I am greatly looking forward to the presentations and discussions that we will share over this evening and tomorrow.

One of these speakers is Dame Carol Kidu, known throughout the Pacific and beyond as a passionate and driven advocate on population and development issues in her own home country of Papua New Guinea, as well as regionally. Since 2002, Dame Carol has been Papua New Guinea's only female cabinet minister.

My NZPPD colleagues Hon Steve Chadwick MP, Paul Hutchison MP, and Tim Barnett, former MP, had the privilege of witnessing Dame Carol at work when they visited Papua New Guinea on an NZPPD study tour in 2006. This study tour focussed on the importance of investing in sexual and reproductive health in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Pacific.

As well as official meetings, participants went to the heart of the matter when they met and talked with sex workers, visited hospitals, health clinics, schools, community development projects and NGOs.

To quote one of my colleagues, *“We lifted up the corner of the covers, and peeped into this land – rich in language, culture and resources. So impressively full of ambition, yet beset by problems which would bring a stronger, larger State to its knees - we were awestruck by what we saw.”*

NZPPD members shared their findings and recommendations for action in a report: *Study Tour to Papua New Guinea: Raising Awareness of the Millennium Development Goals in the Pacific* and in follow up meetings and activities.

Through these experiences, participants learned at the practical level how good sexual and reproductive health is necessary for positive development. This leads me to one of the key messages I have for this symposium in my role as NZPPD Chair: **Population issues, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender, are vital if we are to achieve any development goals, including the MDGs.**

But, what am I actually talking about here?

When I speak of ‘population’, I am not simply referring to numbers and technical demographics. Rather, I am referring to the analysis of the people behind the numbers - the different experiences of individuals aggregated together (for example, youth, elderly, women and men), including analysis of their movement, how many children they have, when they die, the resources they consume, and importantly, their human rights.

When I speak of sexual and reproductive health and rights, this means people having the information and services to have safe intimate relationships, pregnancies, and births, as well as living in supportive, non-discriminatory communities – things that are at the heart of ‘every-day’ life as a human being.

Moving now from definitions, to facts:

- Every 15 seconds another person dies from HIV/AIDS.
- For every two people who receive treatment for HIV, five others are newly infected.
- Every minute a woman dies in childbirth, and for every woman who dies, another 20 experience serious complications.
- Every year, the world loses \$15 billion in productivity because women die in childbirth. It would only cost \$6 billion to provide the health services to save women's lives.

All of these facts highlight the significance of the population challenges the globe faces today, and if addressed, the potential for them to impact positively on the road to development.

If we move to look at the situation in our very own region, the Pacific, the facts also support a focus on population issues if we are to achieve positive and effective development.

There are high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended teenage pregnancy in many Pacific countries. In Papua New Guinea, a generalized epidemic<sup>1</sup> of HIV is growing and there are high rates of maternal mortality. A woman in Papua New Guinea is 50 times more likely to die in childbirth than in New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, there remains inconsistent access to sexual and reproductive health supplies across the region.

Population growth in some countries, such as Vanuatu and Kiribati, has led to a situation whereby some communities have exceeded the carrying capacity of their land.

According to a recent study, discrimination against women by restricting access to schools, hospitals and jobs is costing Asia - Pacific countries nearly \$80 billion a year.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A generalised epidemic is when the virus has been found in a certain number of pregnant women, who serve as a broad indication of the 'general' population.

<sup>2</sup> UNDP Human Development report 2007/2008

<sup>3</sup> UNESCAP Annual Review, 2007.

However, it is crucial to note that there is valuable and vital work being carried out across the Pacific region to address these challenges, and New Zealand has an important role to play in supporting this.

Furthermore, we are facing the reality of a second global crisis, climate change. Again, there is mounting body of evidence that investing in population issues is a vital strategy for achieving environmental sustainability, including mitigating and adapting to climate change. For example, providing sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services that enable people to choose the number of children they have, can help balance natural use and needs of the population.

In 1994, New Zealand joined 178 other countries from around the globe in signing the Programme of Action from the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). This programme of action recognised that when we speak of population issues, including sexual and reproductive health, we are not merely speaking about strategies for development, we are speaking about fundamental human rights. Fifteen years on, this programme is relevant now more than ever and I see great value in addressing the realisation of these human rights throughout this symposium.

Thank you again for this opportunity to be part of this event. I am really looking forward to listening and learning during the symposium. I am also committed to following up at parliamentary level in my role as NZPPD Chair.