

# Ministerial foreword

## Responding to violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor

Australia supports an end to violence against women and girls. Without strong global action, the social, political and economic participation of women in many communities will continue to be severely limited by violence.

Preventing violence against women is as important to the developing countries in our region as it is in Australia. By taking action, communities will be strengthened and the task of achieving the Millennium Development Goals made easier.

AusAID's Office of Development Effectiveness report, *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*, found that violence against women in this part of the world is severe, pervasive and constrains development.

Violence against women is a global problem and one that requires global solutions. Australia is not immune. Nearly one in three Australian women experience physical violence and almost one in five women experience sexual violence in their lifetime.

Australia has zero tolerance for violence against women and is tackling this issue head-on at home by developing a national plan to reduce violence against women and their children.

We must also help our region and the rest of the world to tackle this serious human rights issue.

*Stop Violence: Responding to violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor*, the Australian Government's response to the Office of Development Effectiveness report, sets out our priorities and actions to respond to violence against women in the region.

The report outlines our support to increase women's access to justice and support services, prevent violence against women and deliver a coordinated and comprehensive response to the issue. We are also working hard to ensure measures promoting equality between men and women are included across Australia's entire development assistance program.

Much more needs to be done but together we can make a difference.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Stephen Smith'.

Stephen Smith MP  
Minister for Foreign Affairs

# Executive summary

There is now global recognition that violence against women can undermine, and even reverse, hard-won development gains.

*Stop Violence: Responding to violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor* sets out Australia's priorities and actions to prevent and reduce violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor.

The report has been prepared in response to AusAID's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) report *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*. It outlines the Australian Government's support to increase women's access to justice and access to support services, prevent violence against women, and ensure an integrated approach.

Violence against women, and the fear of violence, are significant human rights violations. The Australian Government recognises that reducing violence against women is crucial to achieving equality between men and women and delivering good development outcomes. The government is committed to reducing violence against women in Australia, as well as contributing to international efforts to end violence against women globally and in our region.

There is now global recognition that violence against women can undermine, and even reverse, hard-won development gains. The impact of violence against women on developed and developing economies is devastating. New research commissioned by Australia's National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children found that if appropriate action is not taken now, violence against women will cost the Australian economy \$15.6 billion by 2021-22.

Ending violence against women will require a long-term commitment and AusAID is intensifying its efforts to respond, as part of the Australian international development assistance program, to violence against women. While the ODE report and this response focus on the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault, AusAID recognises the spectrum of violence that women face and is committed to addressing all forms of gender-based violence through our development assistance program.

## Findings of the Office of Development Effectiveness

In 2007, ODE undertook a study to assess the effectiveness of current approaches and identify promising practices to address violence against women in five countries: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and East Timor.

The research was commissioned because of a growing concern that violence against women was acting as a barrier to development in Melanesia and East Timor, with significant negative impacts on women and their families and communities. The result of this research was the report *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*.

The ODE report found that violence against women is severe, pervasive and constrains development in Melanesia and East Timor. It causes trauma to women and their families and communities. It severely limits women's social, political and economic participation in their communities. It represents a significant strain on national economies with escalating costs in health care, social services, policing and the justice system.

Without a more comprehensive and effective response to violence against women, the ODE report found that the Millennium Development Goals are unlikely to be achieved internationally, including in Melanesia and East Timor.

## Australia's response

This report sets out Australia's initial response to the ODE recommendations for action to end violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor. It examines Australian activities and advocacy that have been undertaken at the country level and the principles and priorities that AusAID will use to guide future work.

## A framework for action

The box below sets out AusAID's vision, aim and the outcomes we will strive to achieve in order to reduce violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor.

| A framework for ending violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Vision:</b><br>Women in Melanesia and East Timor are able to live free from violence and the fear of violence.  |  |  |
| <b>Aim:</b><br>To work in partnership—with national governments, civil society, international partners, and men and women—to increase efforts to reduce and respond to violence against women. |  |  |
| <b>Outcome:</b><br>Women have access to justice  | <b>Outcome:</b><br>Women have access to support services | <b>Outcome:</b><br>Violence against women is prevented |

## Guiding principles for Australia's work

Australia will use the following principles to guide our contribution to ending violence against women. AusAID will:

- > make a long-term commitment to ending violence against women
- > promote gender equality as a central principle of our work
- > work in partnership with key stakeholders and align with partner government priorities
- > adopt an integrated approach.

## Key actions

Australia's support to end violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor will be based around the following key strategies that have proven successful in reducing violence against women within the region and internationally.

### Improving women's access to justice

Ensuring women have access to justice is key to responding to and preventing violence against women. A country's justice system, including formal, customary and community-based systems, should provide protection for women against violence, act as a deterrent to possible offenders, and impose consequences on those who commit domestic violence and sexual assault.

AusAID will support partner countries to increase women's access to justice by:

- > supporting governments to review, implement and monitor laws and policies that address violence against women, including through formal, customary and community-based justice systems
- > supporting civil society organisations that assist women to access justice, including by increasing women's knowledge of their rights and of the legal system
- > supporting improved police practices in responding to violence against women, in partnership with the Australian Federal Police.

For example, the Papua New Guinea – Australia Law and Justice Partnership is working to strengthen the courts so that they are better able to assist victims of violence. The program is supporting the Magisterial Services to implement national guidelines on family and sexual violence, including Practice Directions that help victims of violence understand the steps and processes in court proceedings.

This type of support aims to improve the ability of the justice system to respond to cases of violence against women and, consequently, increase public confidence in the ability of these systems to appropriately respond to and prevent violence against women.

### Increasing women's access to support services

Women who have been subjected to violence have an immediate need for support.

AusAID will support partner countries to increase women's access to support services by:

- > supporting civil society organisations that provide counselling, legal and practical support to women who have experienced violence, including women's safe havens
- > encouraging governments to improve health sector responses to violence against women
- > supporting responses to HIV and AIDS that include consideration of women's vulnerability to gender-based violence.

For example, continuing our support for the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is a cornerstone of Australia's strategy for providing support services to survivors. The centre has a lead role in advocacy for women's rights and delivering practical services. It is the main institution providing psychological, human rights-based crisis counselling and practical support for women and children who have experienced violence in Fiji, and works with other agencies such as the police, courts, doctors and welfare agencies to ensure that women can access these services. Australia has supported the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre since 1989.

## Preventing violence against women

Preventing violence against women from occurring in the first place is the ultimate goal of any actions to end violence against women.

AusAID will support partner countries to prevent violence against women by:

- > supporting and working with a broad range of civil society organisations to conduct community awareness and advocacy to end violence against women, including women's organisations, faith-based organisations and men and boys
- > supporting prevention activities through the education sector
- > supporting women as peacemakers
- > upholding gender equality as a guiding principle of Australia's international development assistance program and supporting activities to empower women, including promoting women's leadership and economic empowerment.

In Vanuatu, for example, the Vanuatu Women's Centre has established Committees Against Violence Against Women, which play a pivotal role in promoting community awareness and advocacy to end violence against women, and in supporting women in rural areas. These committees are made up of prominent men and women from the community—in some cases elders, chiefs and rural practice nurses. The committees receive training from the Vanuatu Women's Centre in legal literacy and basic counselling skills. AusAID has provided core funding to the Vanuatu Women's Centre since 1994.

## Supporting an integrated approach

The ODE report found that piecemeal and isolated activities had limited impact in ending violence against women and could result in duplication of effort. Greater coordination across sectors and among partners will ensure that funds are targeted where they are needed, that good practice is shared, and that links are created across sectors to meet the range of needs of women who have been subjected to violence.

AusAID will support partner countries to take an integrated approach by:

- > engaging in high-level policy dialogue with our partners to raise the importance of addressing violence against women
- > encouraging partner countries to develop mechanisms—such as national action plans and policies—to coordinate and monitor national responses to violence against women
- > actively participating in interagency taskforces that bring together stakeholders to better coordinate and monitor responses to violence against women
- > supporting research on violence against women, including on the prevalence of violence, promising practices in responding to violence, and gaps in services in order to inform future responses.

In Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and East Timor, Australia is working with government, non-government organisations, multilateral organisations and donors to address violence against women and promote gender equality. For example, following the release of the ODE report, AusAID was invited to be a member of the Gender Thematic Working Group in East Timor. This group brings together representatives from government, UN agencies, international development agencies and international non-government organisations to improve coordination efforts.