



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Maternal and Child Health in Papua New Guinea**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 15 March 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Rishworth, Amanda, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

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**Ms RISHWORTH** (Kingston) (7.41 pm)—I too would like to congratulate the member for Fremantle for bringing this very, very important motion to the attention of the House. I too, with the previous government speaker, the member for Shortland, was an attendee on the House of Representatives committee that looked into some of the health issues in the Pacific region and indeed was one of the members who was able to travel to Papua New Guinea and see some of the health services and some of the work that was being done by the government of PNG and some of the AusAID programs and other NGO programs on the ground.

I am very pleased to speak to this motion. As the previous speaker said, we often do think of some of these big issues as being issues that are far away from us. Indeed, it was only when I travelled up to the Torres Strait that I got a concept of just how close a neighbour PNG is to us. In fact, standing in Saibai, you could see PNG, which was less than three kilometres away. Another example of that was that, when we were on the other side, in PNG, travelling to the treaty villages, you could get Telstra coverage—which is more than some of my electors can get, but that is another story. That highlights just how close the relationship is.

While International Women's Day is a great opportunity to look at how women across the world are faring, it is important that we are also looking at our own region. I am indeed very pleased that we are looking at our closest neighbour—a neighbour that we have also had a lot of historic links to; a neighbour that I am pleased to see that the government is forging a new relationship with.

Another issue that the member for Fremantle and other previous speakers mentioned was the millennium goals. I do not think that we can look at millennium goals 4 and 5 and even 6 without addressing the violence against women that is occurring. We heard a lot of stories, and there are a lot of programs. I know that the government are aware of this and are looking at how they might address the violence against women that is happening throughout that society. I think we sometimes try to put violence against women in a different pigeonhole and not in the health pigeonhole, but I do not think we can really address this without looking at gender equality and also violence against women in that country. This issue was raised with us time and time again and it is something that needs to be noted when we are addressing the Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5.

As we heard previously, workforce is another issue that we heard about time and time again. Ensuring that women have access to a health worker when they are having their babies is difficult. This was raised with us especially when we were out in the rural areas and it is an issue that does need to be addressed and does need to be seriously looked at. How do we make sure that workers are trained, that they have the resources that they need and that they also have the support in the local areas where they are working? One thing that we did hear time and time again was that, while there was a health worker allocated to a certain village, they were not adequately supported with housing, so it was very hard for that health worker to continue to do the work that they were doing as they had nowhere to stay. Support for those health workers as well as training up more health workers to ensure that women do have access is incredibly important.

We cannot avoid talking about Millennium Development Goal 6 when it comes to PNG, which is about combating HIV and AIDS, with particular reference to child and maternal mortality. While we were there, we saw some small programs that were very effective at reducing the transmission from mother to child of HIV. This can be done in an effective way, but it does need support and education. That was a very small but inspiring program, which I hope many more mothers and babies in PNG get access to. I have run out of time at this point, so I will finish by commending the motion to the House.