

Conference resolution: International Health and Women's Health SIGs

Held in Perth September 2005

The Safety of Women during Complex Emergencies

The past year has provided us with an opportunity to consider our collective responses and responsibilities with respect to our involvement in and commitment to the other peoples of the world during complex humanitarian emergencies.

PHAA notes that Australian public health practitioners made significant public health contributions to emergency response and recovery efforts following the Boxing Day tsunami, and notes the importance of public health expertise during complex emergencies.

PHAA also notes that:

1. The amount of in-country infrastructure already in place and starting to manage the emergencies at each site prior to the arrival of assistance from overseas, and notes that optimal technical assistance supports and builds on existing structures, which by their nature are culturally appropriate, delivered in a local language, using local infrastructure, and likely to lead to sustained (Recovery and Development Programme). We congratulate NGOs involved in these ways in the response and encourage them always to build response and aid projects and programmes on local expertise as good development practice.

2. An important, but under-recognised problem, which occurs during emergencies which involve the dislocation of populations is that of the protection of the safety and health of women and children. This PHAA conference encourages emergency management planners to consider providing as a matter of routine

- a) separate secure accommodation for families without menfolk,
- b) female disaster workers to assess women's needs confidentially, and
- c) women's health packs including contraception and emergency contraception.

3. The foundation of an effective response to emergencies is based on a well development health and social infrastructure. Development assistance focussing on community development and health programmes is a critical part of minimising the negative health impact of disasters and emergencies.

In this context, the PHAA wishes to acknowledge the Government's commitment to increased official development assistance (ODA). We look forward to participation in consultation about equitable disbursement of development assistance in ensuring women's safety and rights.