

This brings me back to the main issue, and I will finish by saying that there are people suffering here and around the world. Aid should be given, either in the form of increased pensions or payments here or by foreign aid, but always with accountability.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (7.04 pm)—This week from 12 to 18 October marks Anti-Poverty Week and the United Nations has declared Friday, 17 October as International Anti-Poverty Day. During this week we reflect on poverty in Australia and recognise that, although our country is not perfect, Australians are in many circumstances much luckier than people in other parts of the world. We are a rich country and as such we have a moral responsibility to play a role in helping developing countries establish good education and health systems, as well as stable government. In 2008-09 Australia will provide nearly \$4 billion in official development assistance, ODA. Nearly \$3 billion will be managed by AusAID. The ratio of Australia's ODA to gross national income is estimated at 0.3 per cent for 2007-08. The 2008-09 budget increases the ratio to 0.32 per cent. The government expects the ratio to increase again to 0.35 per cent in 2009-10, 0.37 in 2010-11 and 0.38 in 2011-12. The government has a commitment to increase Australia's ratio to 0.5 per cent by 2015-16.

The Asia-Pacific region remains a poor part of the world. The Asia Development Bank and the United Nations estimate that about 641 million people in this region continue to live on less than one US dollar per day. Australia has been a strong supporter of the Millennium Development Goals. These goals were adopted unanimously by the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000. The MDG are a set of global development objectives to be achieved by 2015. The MDG have eight specific objectives, including eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV-AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development. The 2008-09 budget also provides assistance to faster progress towards the MDG by increasing Australia's multilateral engagement, development financing and Australia's core funding for key UN agencies. The budget also established new programs in infrastructure development, land administration and public sector capacity building.

I have many constituents in my electorate who contacted me since my first election on the issue of Australia's foreign aid. They have expressed an interest in Australia's foreign aid program and expressed to me a desire for an increase in Australian ODA. I have been pleased to inform my constituents of the government's commitment to increase our ODA and I am delighted to inform the chamber that there are many organisations in my electorate which also do their bit in working towards those objectives.

There are also volunteer organisations which help refugees and refugee families once they arrive in Australia to integrate into our community. I am patron of an organisation called SCARF, which is made up of volunteers. They work to provide assistance to local refugees who settle in Wollongong from the African continent. They do excellent work running homework programs for children, running learn to drive programs for adults, teaching adults how to seek work in a local area and working with local employers to increase their ability to become full citizens.

I should indicate that I am also a member of the Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad, APHEDA. I would like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to people in my own local area like Cathy Bloch, who is a local trade unionist I have known for a long time, an activist and a particular advocate on behalf of APHEDA. In fact, she told me that on the weekend they had a very successful fundraising dinner. I think it is a really important role that the union movement has played through its international connections through that organisation. I also acknowledged Peter Jennings, APHEDA's executive officer, who I have dealt with on a number of occasions as well.

APHEDA was established in 1984 as the overseas agency of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. My connection to it goes back to my teaching days and I have been very pleased to be able to continue to participate in it. I particularly like the program where you can decide what particular areas you would like to focus your donations in and to do some extra work for women and children in some of the countries where they provide assistance.

Anti-Poverty Week is an important week and our electorates do their bit. It is important that the government also does its bit in meeting those goals.

Mr COULTON (Parkes) (7.09 pm)—I am very happy to speak on this motion relating to international poverty and Australia's efforts to assist those in need. As we all know, this week is Anti-Poverty Week and the United Nations has declared this Friday, 17 October, International Anti-Poverty Day. As Australians, we are extremely fortunate to live in a country where extreme poverty is not a common occurrence. But as those of us who have travelled in neighbouring regions know, we do not have to go very far to find that there are people who in horrific conditions.

Earlier this year I was very fortunate to be part of the Australian parliamentary delegation to Cambodia to observe Cambodia's fourth national general elections. My visit to Cambodia really highlighted for me the level of