

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Australian Aid Program

[Mrs MOYLAN](#) (Pearce) (1.29 p.m.)—Firstly I thank my colleague the member for Riverina for bringing before the House this motion on the [Australian aid](#) program. The member for Riverina was elected to the Asia-Pacific group of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians in the IPU, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in Kenya early last year. Those of us participating in that conference are very proud of the contribution the member for Riverina is making to the work of the IPU women's committee. The member for Riverina has made a very big impact in the IPU meetings. Some people say she is a pocket rocket—there is not much of her but she certainly has an impact—and that is true.

This motion fits well with the member for Riverina's interest in improving the participation of women in politics and her work to improve the quality of life for both women and girls. The motion supports the work of the Australian government to eradicate poverty and corruption and to strengthen democratic institutions by promoting good governance with specific reference to women and children in developing countries. I agree with my colleague the member for Hindmarsh that poverty is a huge issue that not only affects the quality of life for individuals but will also threaten regional security if it is not handled and eradicated.

It is difficult to believe that in the 21st century, when so much has been achieved in science, medicine, education and communications, women and children in developing countries are still denied basic human rights. Gender discrimination continues to thrive, denying women and children property rights, access to legal representation, employment and protection against violence and discrimination.

While recognising that much more needs to be done, the Australian government continues to provide support for improving governance within our region. The difficulty we have is that political instability and lack of security feed into the poverty cycle and put women and children at greater risk. Australia has contributed \$4 billion in aid—I think that is what the member for Riverina said—and will contribute \$645 million in aid to women and children in the Asia-Pacific with a strong emphasis on anticorruption, leadership development, respect for women and the promotion of equal participation in public life. On top of that, Australia has been playing a very significant role in helping to restore law and order in the Solomons because, where law and order do not exist, women and children are particularly at risk, as I said, and it does feed into the poverty cycle.

Australia is also playing a very significant role, along with our Portuguese colleagues—and the member for Riverina and I recently had the opportunity along with other members of the IPU delegation to visit the Portuguese parliament and to talk to our Portuguese colleagues—in continuing to work in East Timor to build institutions that will give East Timor stability and to provide opportunities for women to establish microbusinesses to employ young people. We know that providing microcredit to women has very positive outcomes. World Bank research shows that women make an effective contribution to government in postconflict situations. Women's influence leads efforts to fight corruption and to establish accountability processes at both a national and local level. Where women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster and poverty reduction is more rapid. It makes sense for developing countries to use the talents and abilities of the other half of their population which so often goes underutilised.

The government supports the Regional Rights Resource Team, which works in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Kiribati, and also supports legal rights training officers based in Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and the Cook Islands. This support involves training, technical support, policy and advocacy advice in human rights, social justice and good governance in the Pacific region. It encourages leaders to embrace good governance principles—including the ratification and implementation of human rights conventions and exploring the relationship between customary law and human rights—and combat corruption.

Australia makes a significant contribution throughout the world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, and Australian members of parliament can play a significant role in encouraging more women in the region to take on positions of leadership. *(Time expired)*