



Press statement 16 May 2015

ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY CYGEN CONFERENCE CALLS FOR GREATER INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

The Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network meeting in Malta, sponsored by the Australian Government, has called for more action on domestic violence in the Commonwealth. In some parts of the Pacific around 70 per cent of women are being subjected to domestic violence and in some countries, where they've undertaken formal studies, it's reported that two thirds of those women lost consciousness during an attack.

Australia is sponsoring the first-ever Commonwealth Youth Gender Equality Network conference in the lead up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Malta this November. The unique conference is bringing together delegates from 22 of the 53 Commonwealth Nation states. The delegates have been chosen from 600 applicants across the Commonwealth who are working in areas such as child marriage, FGM, LGBT rights, empowerment of women through education and entrepreneurship and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The aim is to capacity-build and empower young people, who will then go back to their countries and start connecting with others to join the network and to strive for change.

Australian Global Fellow in Women, Peace and Security at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, and Australia's inaugural Global Ambassador for Women and Girls, Penny Williams, addressing the conference, stressed that the youth delegates need to use many angles, working with established agencies, non-traditional partners as well as official structures, to connect women as agents of change and also engage men as advocates against violence:

"We're having a national conversation on that in Australia and that's critical that the issue's opened up. I think we can see that across the Commonwealth, across the Pacific, people are starting to talk about this issue. Part of it is education. Men standing up against violence against women is a very powerful tool to use."

Penny Williams also stressed the importance of keeping girls in school, and the importance of education in ending practices such as child marriage and improving health incomes for girls. 99% of maternal deaths occur in developing countries.

The CYGEN conference organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society is the first of its type in bringing young Commonwealth citizens together to use their common connections across the 53 nation family to form a youth network specifically for gender equality. Delegates to the conference will join a social media and on-line network, as well as engaging with community groups and leaders in their own countries to expand the network, which it's hoped will form a strong Commonwealth voice for change in gender issues.

"I think the Commonwealth's got a really good story to tell, I think the Commonwealth can be really proud of its work on gender issues," Penny Williams said.

The forum delegates are developing an outcome statement, aims and objectives, which will be presented tomorrow (Sunday) to the President of Malta, HE Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca ahead of CHOGM in November.

BROADCASTERS, AGENCIES AND ONLINE VIDEO SITES

A free-to-use Video News Release featuring conference highlights is available for download below.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7XVgx5S_NZWQVhIY0FiempBZTQ/view?usp=sharing

Video format: Quicktime H.264 1080i HD.

Audio: Dual channel (L- Interviews, grabs. R- Natural sound)

Contents:

-Presentation and interview with Penny Williams

-GVs of Penny's speech and delegates at CYGEN

NOTES TO EDITORS

The CYGEN Conference runs from 13-17 May at the Corinthia Hotel, St George's Bay, Malta.

The Royal Commonwealth Society is the oldest civil society organisation in the Commonwealth, established in 1868 to uphold the value and values of the Commonwealth.

RCS Report on 'Hidden Violence in the Commonwealth' can be found at:

<https://thercs.org/assets/Research-/Summit-Booklet-Website.pdf>

RCS Report on 'Building a Constructive Commonwealth Approach to LGBT Rights at:

<https://thercs.org/assets/Research-/LGBTCitizenshipReport-130315-FINAL.pdf>

Contact: Carolyn Jack, COO Royal Commonwealth Society, +44 7718 476 233