

PO Box A147
Sydney South
NSW 1235
DX 585 Sydney
alhr@alhr.asn.au
www.alhr.asn.au



For Immediate Release 19 March 2018

Turnbull Government must publicly reject attacks within its ranks on the human rights of women and girls'

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) has welcomed statements by Defence Minister Marise Payne, speaking on behalf of Foreign Minister Julie Bishop reaffirming Australia's commitment to its partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation. However, ALHR has also called on the Federal Government to do more to ensure that Australia is meeting its international obligations to guarantee the reproductive health rights of women and girls'. The calls come in response to comments by MP George Christensen and incoming Senator Amanda Stoker at an anti-abortion rally in Queensland on Sunday.

MP George Christensen said that he intends to petition the Treasurer Scott Morrison to cease funding of family planning services that include abortion in Australia and around the world.

The Federal Government provides 9.5 million dollars in funding delivering a program called the Sexual and Reproductive Health Program in Crisis and Post Crisis Settings (SPRINT) in partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation. The program works in the in the Indo-Pacific region to provide safer birthing environments, family planning services, HIV prevention and treatment, protection against sexual violence and assistance to survivors of rape and violence in crisis-affected places. Mr Christensen reportedly described this funding as a "disgraceful act."

Co-Chair of ALHR's Women and Girls' Rights Committee, Associate Professor Rita Shackel said, "ALHR is concerned that members of the Federal Government appear to be supporting denial of access to, and the continued criminalisation of, abortion services. Such a position is inconsistent with Australia's human rights obligations. Reproductive rights are recognised by international law as belonging to all women and girls everywhere and include the right to access safe and legal abortions", said Associate Professor Shaker.

"Numerous United Nations human rights bodies including the UN Human Rights Committee, The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health, have provided States with clear guidance on reproductive rights. They have emphasised that ensuring access to safe and legal abortion services is part of a country's obligations to eliminate discrimination against women and girls and ensure their right to health as well as other fundamental human rights."

Anna Kerr, Co-Chair of ALHR's Women and Girls' Rights Committee added, "Members of the Australian Government should be unambiguously supporting women and girls' right to autonomy over their own bodies and health. Those who seek abortions should not be treated as criminals and nor should organisations devoted to protecting women and girls, especially victims of violence, be targeted for their pro-choice policy positions."

Kerr continued, "One in three Australian women will have an abortion in their lifetime. The majority of Australians recognise that laws in States that are yet to decriminalise abortion need to change. Data from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes found that 81% of Australians believe a woman should have the right to choose to have an abortion, with 77% of those who identify as religious also supporting a woman's right to choose."

"ALHR continues to call for the decriminalisation of abortion in all Australian jurisdictions – a measure that is clearly supported by the majority of the community."

Media Contact: To arrange an interview please contact Matt Mitchell

M: 0431 980 365 **E:** media@alhr.org.au

ALHR was established in 1993 and is a national association of Australian solicitors, barristers, academics, judicial officers and law students who practise and promote international human rights law in Australia. ALHR has active and engaged National, State and Territory committees and specialist thematic committees. Through advocacy, media engagement, education, networking, research and training, ALHR promotes, practices and protects universally accepted standards of human rights throughout Australia and overseas.