



# *Media Release*

## **Australia supports the establishment of the Fiji Business Coalition on HIV and AIDS**

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In partnership with the Fiji-Australia Business Council and UNAIDS, the Australian aid program is supporting the establishment of the Fiji Business Coalition on HIV and AIDS. The Coalition will assist businesses around Fiji prevent and reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS on business and private sector employees in the country, for example in implementing workplace policies.

The Australian Government is providing over F\$30,000 as seed funding for the establishment the **Fiji Business Coalition on HIV and AIDS**. The funds will also assist in the Coalition's first year of operations.

An agreement marking the partnership was signed today by Australia's HIV Ambassador, Mr Murray Proctor, and the President of the Fiji-Australia Business Council, Ms Caz Tebbutt Dennis. Also present at the signing were Australian High Commissioner James Batley and Steven Vete from the Asia Pacific Leadership Forum will be representing UNAIDS.

Mr Proctor said the Fiji Business Coalition on HIV and AIDS will add to the growing number of business coalitions in the Asia Pacific region which are actively engaging the private sector in reducing the impact of HIV and AIDS in their countries.

"I am very pleased to be back here again in Fiji," Mr Proctor said. "I was here in December to talk with the Fiji-Australia Business Council about the importance of HIV to businesses. It is fantastic to be here again to sign this partnership to establish a Fiji Business Coalition on HIV."

HIV remains an ongoing threat to development around the world. Approximately 4.9 million people in the Asia Pacific region are living with HIV. In Fiji there are currently 265 confirmed cases of HIV. This is a significant increase from the 182 reported cases in December 2004.

"In PNG it is believed that up to 2% of adults are HIV infected. Twenty years ago there were no reported cases of HIV. Fiji shares a number of the same risk factors as PNG: - high rates of sexually transmitted infections, low rates of condom use and high rates of violence against women and labour mobility. It is a sobering reminder for Fiji," Mr Proctor said.

Australia is a strong advocate for businesses taking an active role in preventing and reducing the impact of HIV.

“Most of the people affected by the epidemic are young adults in their most productive years. AIDS affects the productivity of businesses. It takes people out of the workforce whether due to illness, or the caring responsibilities. It has the potential to greatly affect the health of workers in Fiji and therefore the health of Fiji markets. It is an issue therefore that businesses need to be involved in,” Mr Proctor said.

Australia will spend approximately \$130 million in 2008/09 on programs to prevent the spread of HIV and mitigate its effects. In March this year, the Australia Government announced a commitment of \$30 million (2009-2013) for the Pacific Islands HIV and STI Response Fund announced in March 2008.

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